



ATTC

Unifying science, education
and services to transform lives.



In My Own Words.

Celebrating Students' Stories of Recovery . . .
A compilation of essays by high school and college students

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



Unifying science, education
and services to transform lives.

Published in 2010 by the
Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) National Office
University of Missouri - Kansas City
ATTC National Office
5100 Rockhill Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64110

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At the time of publication, Eric Broderick, D.D.S., M.P.H, served as the SAMHSA Acting Administrator. H. Westley Clark, MD, JD, MPH, served as CSAT Director, Jack B. Stein, LCSW, Ph.D., served as Director of CSAT's Division of Services Improvement, Catherine D. Nugent, LCPC, served as the Quality Improvement and Branch Chief, and Donna Doolin, LSCSW, served as the CSAT Project Officer.

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The purpose of the Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) Network is to develop and strengthen the workforce which provides addictions treatment and recovery services to those entering the treatment system. Annually in the United States, more than 1.6 million friends and family members receive treatment for the abuse of alcohol and drugs (NSDUH, 2008). As part of the United States Federal Government's effort in drug control, the Network is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT).

In partnership with Single State Authorities, treatment provider associations, addictions counselors, multidisciplinary professionals, faith and recovery community leaders, family members of those in recovery, and other stakeholders, the ATTC Network assesses the training and development needs of the substance use disorders workforce. To meet the identified needs, the Network develops and conducts training and other technology transfer activities, especially targeting the frontline counselor. Particular emphasis is on raising awareness of and improving skills in using evidence-based and promising treatment/recovery practices for the purpose of changing practice.

Established in 1993, the Network consists of fourteen Regional Centers and a National Office, which serve all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Islands.

Together we take a unified approach in delivering cutting-edge products, services and resources to support a powerful workforce...a workforce that has the potential to transform lives.

raising
awareness
building
skills
changing
practice


Congratulations to the 2009 winners of the “In My Own Words...” Essay Contest and thank you to all contributors for participating in a first of its kind contest specifically designed for students enrolled in the nation’s recovery schools. It took a tremendous amount of courage to share your thoughts, feelings and wisdom about the challenges of being a student in recovery, as well as what motivates you to stay in recovery. Through your participation in the ATTC Network’s 2009 Essay Contest, you are representing and providing a voice for young people in recovery. These essays provide a unique and insightful look into the reality of addiction and recovery and more so, they provide hope to countless others in recovery; professionals, families and friends.

Recovery schools exist at both the high school and collegiate level. They provide academic services and assistance for students in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. With embedded recovery supports, recovery schools provide students in recovery the opportunity to receive credit towards a high school diploma or a college degree.

The Association of Recovery Schools (ARS) had the privilege of partnering with the ATTC National Office on this unique opportunity for recovery schools students. Since 2002, the ARS has been advocating for the promotion, strengthening, and expansion of secondary and post-secondary programs designed for students and families committed to achieving success in both education and recovery. The ARS exists to support such schools which, as components of the recovery continuum of care, enroll students committed to being abstinent from alcohol and other drugs and working a program of recovery. It is our organization’s hope and desire that any student wishing to attend a recovery school has the opportunity and these schools are seen as valued, necessary, and adequately funded parts of both the education and treatment systems.

A special thanks to all the staff working in recovery schools across the nation. Without your support and encouragement, this essay contest would not have come to fruition. Furthermore, it is your commitment and compassion that contributes to the betterment of the students you work with on a daily basis.

It is an honor to have such a compilation of essays from young people. Their challenges and motivations are real. It is through their writing that the value of recovery and a supportive academic environment is heard.


Monique Bourgeois, LADC
Executive Director
Association of Recovery Schools

Letter from
Monique
Bourgeois,
LADC

Executive Director
Association of
Recovery Schools



Aspire

In My Own Words

*"Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart.
Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens." -Carl Jung*

In 2008, over 12 percent of youth in the United States aged 12-17 either abused or were dependent on alcohol. Of the 1.2 million youths who needed treatment, only 77,000 received care at a dedicated treatment facility (2008, NSDUH). Every young person deserves to reach their fullest potential. Achieving sobriety and life-long recovery is a daunting task for any individual, but for young people, it can be even more difficult. They must not only navigate the tough road of recovery while in school, but also face the added pressures of adolescence. These stressors make them extremely vulnerable for relapse. Fortunately, there are addiction treatment and recovery services professionals who can help guide and support these adolescents toward the miracle of recovery.

In recognition of the 2009 National Alcohol & Drug Addiction Recovery Month, the Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) National Office, in partnership with the Association of Recovery Schools (ARS), orchestrated the 2nd annual "In My Own Words..." Essay Contest to celebrate student recovery and highlight the work of recovery schools. The essay contest offers a unique portrayal of youth in recovery through the submission of deeply personal stories from students attending recovery schools across the country. "These stories do an excellent job of highlighting the importance recovery schools are playing in their lives," said Monique Bourgeois, Executive Director of ARS. Recovery schools offer a safe environment where students can continue on their recovery path as they work toward graduation.

Each student was asked to describe their journey by completing two phrases: "The most challenging part about being a student in recovery is ..." and "Throughout my journey, I have been motivated to stay in recovery because...". Within this Essay Booklet you will find the first, second and third place recovery high school and college prize-winning essays chosen by an Expert Review Panel, as well as nine additional essays receiving honorable mention. It was a difficult task selecting the contest winners from the rich pool of 65 entries. We are grateful to all of the recovery school teachers who encouraged their students to share their very personal thoughts and experiences with us. In turn, we hope these essays will not only inspire readers, but also motivate other students in recovery to continue on their path. Ultimately, we hope the stories will encourage others to consider choosing a career in the addictions treatment and recovery services field in the future. It is indeed a noble profession!

A lifelong journey of recovery begins with a single day of complete sobriety. This has been, and will continue to be, a long road — fulfilling, challenging, and amazing. Every day is another day free from the obsession to drink and drug. Along this road I have learned an inevitable amount about myself and about living life on a different basis. This new way of life seems to be the only normal one today. When I first got sober, I didn't even know what my favorite color was. I had elaborate dreams of becoming something when I got older, but none of them were going to become realistic goals. Today, I have learned that those dreams are achievable goals. **First I had to treat myself with respect in order to know how to treat other people with respect, and today I have learned that love and tolerance is a rewarding way to treat others.**

At the beginning it was about “acting myself into a new way of thinking” and today, those actions come almost naturally. In order for me to stay sober and happy I know that I have to continue living this way. Patience is something that never came naturally to me but with the tools I have to deal with my problems today, patience is definitely at the top of my “to use” list. The worst day in my sobriety comes nowhere near my best day in drinking and drugging. Today, I have learned gratitude.

path of
mine

The most challenging thing about being in recovery is doing step work. There are twelve steps. I am not going to lie. I've only made it to the second step, and I didn't want my higher power to be God. I kind of want it to be, but I don't know. I do know step work is hard even though I've only made it to the second step. My dad has gone through it and he said that it is hard work, but it keeps him sober. My step mom has been through the process too. One of the requirements of step work is changing people, places, and things. For me, changing my persons, places, and things was the hardest. The place I was using was my brother's house. That's my family and I love my brother. I'd do anything for him and he'd do anything for me, so I just couldn't stay away from there. So I just kept on using, using, and using because I couldn't stay away. It was almost impossible, but I knew I had to do it if I wanted to make it in recovery. I don't go over there anymore. I stay away from all my friends who use.

I know my recovery comes first in my life because I don't want to end up back where I was. I don't want to go back to selling drugs, end up shot, dying in prison, or dying of AIDS.

The most challenging part about being a student in recovery is dealing with the urges to use and the euphoric recall. These make concentrating on school very difficult. I do my best to make sure I'm on top of school work by talking to teachers and asking questions when I need help, which I refused to do before I came into recovery. **I'm learning to be a responsible student, as well as a young adult.** I'm taking charge of my life.

Throughout my journey I have been motivated to stay in recovery because of my family. My family has stood by my side throughout my entire addiction. No matter what I do they still love me and never judge me. My parents never give up on me, and that used to baffle me, but now I appreciate all they've done for me. The fact they have never given up has taught me not to give up. My family's love for me is my rock. Without them I wouldn't be in recovery.

For me, the most challenging parts about being a student in recovery are making sober friends, being over whelmed with responsibilities, asking for help and being afraid of failure. The way I overcome these challenges is by going to meetings and talking to other people my age. It has been difficult for me to keep from getting overwhelmed with my responsibilities, such as going to school, working, attending meetings, maintaining boundaries with my family and having fun all at the same time. I try not to ask for help because I'm afraid of looking stupid in front of other students. I feel like this because I am afraid of failure and I grew up with my dad telling me I was a failure. **At first I would not even try at things, but then I realized that if I put my mind to do something, I can be successful!** Since I have been in recovery, I found that with a little patience, I don't feel like a failure as I did when I was using.

Throughout my journey I have been motivated to stay in recovery because I no longer feel like a disappointment to my family and self. The drama that contributed to my unmanageability has decreased and I never have to be alone like I felt when I was using. Even though I have had to make a tough decision of being in foster care, I know that I have the skills and motivation to work my recovery.

Christina Terry

Remington House
Ft. Collins, CO

Some struggle with school or work and others struggle with friends and family. I struggle with staying alive and staying clean. I am Christina and this is my story about the miracle that is my recovery. In life there will always be challenging situations. It's the same in recovery. There is no outline of the challenges faced in recovery. There are different areas and levels of difficulty for every recovering addict. The most challenging part of recovery for me would have to be feeling true emotions for the first time in seven years. When I used drugs, I didn't have to feel anything; actually I couldn't feel anything, even happiness.

I love being sober and being able to be happy naturally, but every time I get sad or mad or hurt I feel the urge to use. It's hard sometimes to decide whether being happy is worth more than not having to feel any pain. So far (and hopefully for the rest of my life) I find that being happy is way better than numbing myself completely.

Although I have the urge to use sometimes, I don't. Throughout my journey of recovering, I have found motivation in myself. I know the wonderful person I am when I am sober and want to stay this way. I have also looked back at my past and seen how it has hurt me and others. I've also realized what I want my future to be.

> Second Place High School Recipient

Lindsey Irvine

Serenity High School
McKinney, TX

The most challenging part about being a student in recovery is the inevitable opportunities to use that wait. It is especially difficult to be young and in recovery because there is much anxiety about what lies ahead. I find myself constantly evaluating my situation and deciding the best way to avoid any chance to use.

I began rehabilitation in June of 2009. I participated in a wilderness program in the North Georgia Mountains for twenty-eight days. In addition to regaining my personality, I started to undo an intertwined web of pain and confusion. My counselors showed me why I was behaving the way I was and were able to give me new resources to use for coping, instead of my desired drug.

Shortly after my twenty eight days were up, I temporarily moved in with my grandparents in Texas to reestablish my priorities and remove myself from the environment I was in. I am still here today. I attend a small school for students with problems similar to mine. Here, we discuss how we can help ourselves and find comforting support.

I am motivated more than ever to stay sober because of my family. They have shown me more love than I ever thought I was capable of receiving. Their wanting nothing but the best for me makes me want the same even more. Most important of all, I want to be sober for me. I want the satisfaction of saying that I overcame my desire to use again.

2nd Place Recipient

new
choices

There are many things that I think are challenging about recovery. The most challenging thing about recovery is putting principles before personalities. When I was using I didn't care about how I treated others. Today, I have a conscience. I feel guilty when I treat people like crap. I don't have to treat people that way today. In Alcoholics Anonymous we have principles which we try to live by. They are: **hope, honesty, faith, courage, integrity, willingness, humility, love, justice, perseverance, spirituality, and service.** That's a lot to swallow. The good thing about practicing principles before personalities is that it is progress, not perfection. I have always been a dishonest person, but I don't have to live that way today. When I tell a lie, no matter how big or small, I have the choice to go back and do my best to fix what I did wrong. Alcoholics Anonymous and a loving sponsor have taught me how to live.

Throughout my journey I have been motivated to stay in recovery for many reasons. The reasons change from day to day. Some days I don't want to be sober at all, but I am just too stubborn to give up the seven months that I have. I stay sober for myself, my family, my friends, and so that I can have a future. I don't ever want to live the life I was living when I came into treatment and I don't ever have to.

At the tender age of thirteen, only a child, I stuck a needle into my arm in the pursuit of that perfect high that was supposed to lift my darkness and satisfy my every desire. I found this with heroin. Yet I quickly reached a criminal record and homelessness. I was engulfed in the terrible things that I had told myself I would never let myself get to. I had no drive to get sober. I had no drive to stop stealing or cheating. No one could pull me out of this quicksand. No one could help me until I was ready. I spent countless nights wishing to die, finally realizing recovery was my only way out. At the age of fifteen, I went to Hazelden in Minnesota. I completed my treatment and returned to my hometown of Lynn, and I now attend the Recovery High School in Beverly.

One major force that keeps me in this recovery game is the pure fact of pain. **The pain I have caused and lived through is enough to make me do anything for my sobriety.** My father, who, in my eyes, is the strongest person in the world, was brought to his knees in tears. My mother could no longer look into my eyes. Watching everyone around me in pain because of my actions is something I cannot stomach anymore. Last March, I lost my best friend to the terrible disease of addiction. I credit my life to Recovery High, another driving force to staying sober. The support I give and receive here allows me to make my life complete. My sobriety is a gift I cannot afford to give back.

Tyrie
Travis

Hope Academy
Indianapolis, IN

The most challenging part about being in recovery is going to a recovery high school. I am a junior and I have been at Hope Academy High School since I was a freshmen. When I try to explain to people my school, most people do not understand it. Hope Academy is a normal high school that is just based off of recovery. I think it's the best thing that has ever happened to me when it comes to school.

I was a student in the Gary Community School Corporation, but I was dealing with addiction, so school was not a priority. I slowly let my education slip away. I was still dealing with depression from my mom dying and my best friend dying next to me.

When I moved to Indianapolis I was able to manage my sobriety and school in one building. I love Hope Academy and I love going to school today. **I think that is so amazing that I am around a group of people that understand my everyday life.** It's not always glitter and gold, we still are teenagers and we still live life on life terms, but we talk to each other more than the average school. We get to meet new people in the program and go to meetings and support each other. There are some people that look at me differently because of the school I go to, but I am a normal student. I just have the disease of addiction.

a regular
teen

> First Place College Recipient

Jessica
Danielzuk

Augsburg College
Minneapolis, MN

The number one most challenging thing about being a student in recovery is letting go of my friends who are still using. These are the people who I built my dreams with — one friend I've known since I was eight. Now I am branching off into a new space that cannot include them. My new identity does not allow for the carelessness of messing around in situations that would compromise my sobriety. Though I've been honest with people, this still requires of me the gut wrenching task of ignoring messages, e-mails and thoughts of them. I miss them. I cry at night sometimes thinking about them. I fight with myself not to call them on their birthdays and tell them I love them. Some roam the campus where I live. I pass them with fierceness like an army and silently sell out on, and break, the bond we have.

What motivates me to stay in recovery are the kind and loving people who have guided me. I trust in their wisdom. I just can't bear the pain of drug addiction and the way it literally takes my shoes away. **My belief in God carries me through and I believe carries my love to those people without me having to do so directly.** I am motivated from my heart. The same one that loves those people, but now my heart tells me to do different things and I trust it.

1st Place Recipient

The most challenging aspect of being a student in recovery is the struggle to maintain consciousness of my recovery. Life seems to be always in motion, and I sometimes have great difficulty reflecting upon the miracle of my recovery. God graciously intervened in my life to enable me to embrace recovery. As I experience success in my studies, I want to be proud and believe that I am solely responsible for my accomplishments. To remain in a state of gratitude, I must abandon my pride and remember that God is the true source of my success; this is the most difficult challenge of being a student in recovery in my experience.

Throughout my journey, I have been motivated to stay in recovery because of the beauty of recovery; the principles of recovery are absolutely inspiring. Realizing the manifestation of righteousness in my life allows me to be joyful, helpful, and hopeful. Surrendering myself to principles of recovery has given so much peace to my life. Following principles of recovery has moved me to be of service to people. I began volunteering in a hospital early in my recovery and found much fulfillment contributing care for hospital patients.

I have connected with so many amazing people in recovery, and these connections have proved to be most beneficial. In troublesome times, I am confident that someone will always be willing to comfort me. God is constantly present. Thus, the inspiration to stay in recovery is so very abundant in my life today.

Jessica
Poland

Serenity High School
McKinney, TX

I started out drinking when I was fourteen years of age. I thought my drinking was not harmful at that point. Actually my drinking didn't progress until I was seventeen when my parents were going through a divorce. I started to treat everyone around me like they meant nothing to me. The most challenging part about being a student in recovery is that a lot of students use and they talk about drugs a lot, which makes it hard for me because I would want to use after hearing them talk about drugs.

Throughout my journey, I have been motivated to stay in recovery because I really don't want to go back being the way I used to be. I also feel like I am a part of my family, I have friends that are my real friends and I feel I am a better person now. I have the sober living skills of high self-esteem and assertiveness along with clear decision-making skills.

sober life
is better

Jill
Camerone

Hope Academy
Indianapolis, IN

The most important part about being in recovery to me is staying calm in difficult situations so that my anger and frustrations don't lead to me relapsing. For me, being on probation makes it even harder to stay clean. It's really scary because if I do use again, I will probably spend 3 to 6 months in juvenile.

Throughout my journey I have been motivated to stay in recovery because it is so much harder to stay clean when you're alone. But here at Hope Academy, I have friends to help me out along the way who are also struggling to stay sober. So if I ever have thoughts on using again, I just ask someone for their support and it really helps me out. We talk about why I am thinking about using and how that could have a negative or positive effect on my life. It's great because before I came here, I never thought about what I was going to do before it happened and thought about what the consequences would be. I don't know how I would still be staying clean and being happy about it, if it weren't for all the great people at this school.

support
works

> Third Place College Recipient

Leslie
French

Olympic College
Bremerton, WA

The most challenging part of being a student in recovery is managing my anxiety. I have many fears, one of which is failure. Today I consider anxiety a hurdle to get over. Every time I get past an anxiety hurdle, it has less power over me, and I have more power over it. When it comes to tests, or class presentations, I challenge myself. I ask myself, "What is the worst thing that could happen?" My answer is, I might fail, faint, or not make any sense. I have never fainted or failed a class at Olympic College. As for not making sense, only my Professors and peers can answer that question, but I am sure they would say I pulled through. The reality is, allowing fear and anxiety to prevent me from obtaining my goals would be the true failure.

Throughout my journey I have been motivated to stay in recovery to help others learn what I have learned, and that is, gifts of the spirit, such as humility, gratitude, and forgiveness (of self and others) are often a result of one's challenge or hardship in life, and in my case, addiction. I am also motivated by my loving, supportive, and amazing family. Today my life is never hopeless as it was when I was in the grips of my disease. My life is good. It is rarely just alright, and a lot of the times it's awesome. I have been sober since July 11, 2007, and I will be forever grateful at a second chance at life. As long as I stay in recovery, I will continue to discover who I am and who I am meant to be.

3rd Place Recipient

Kris
Behrns

Waverly High School
Ft. Collins, CO

Through abandonment, rape, drugs, and depression, I have survived. My mother left me when I was eleven months-old. If it wasn't for my father, I wouldn't have a story to tell. When I was thirteen, I got high for the first time with my sixteen year-old cousin. At fifteen I went into my first treatment center. Five months later, I was raped by a man I met in a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. I'm in my fifth treatment program and I'm turning eighteen in December. The worst thing about being an addict at seventeen is missing out on the normal teenage experiences. When fifteen year-olds were going to homecoming, I was getting high in a tree house. I never finished ninth grade in public school and I've been to three after-school functions. It's also hard to meet people when I've been isolated for so long.

These days what gets me through is that I know I've been through worse things than lock-up. Getting to know my family again, letting them get to know me, and looking forward to things, keeps me going. There's just under a year until my program is over. **I want to go and make a difference in this world or at least find out what it has to offer.** I let drugs and things that happened to me control my life, but now I've learned to accept what happened, control my urges and cravings, and work at making my future brighter than my past.

accept.
what is



Essay Review
Panel:

Monique Bourgeois
Executive Director
Association of
Recovery Schools

Jim Aiello
Director
Northeast ATTC



Pat Taylor
Executive Director
Faces and Voices
of Recovery

Resilience

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The ATTC Network is funded by:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
csat.samhsa.gov