

# Rx Awareness Real Stories

## Cortney's Story



### My recovery from opioid addiction took time to repair the enormous trail of wreckage I had created

Supporting people in their addiction recovery is so much more than my job—it is a passion. This passion not only helps the individuals I work with but also helps me sustain my own recovery from substance use disorder.

### From just one pill...

My first prescription opioid pill came from a girlfriend, who told me that it was safe and harmless because it came from her doctor. But that pill flipped a switch inside me that took away my emotional pain and made me numb. I knew hard drugs were illegal and taboo, but I didn't think that these pills were dangerous. I had no idea that I could actually get addicted—I just knew that I felt sick when I stopped taking them.

I went from being an honors student and varsity athlete, to a high school dropout in just 1 year. I tried to go to college after getting my GED, but my life revolved around using pills. I was so dependent on the pills that I became a shell of the person that I used to be. I stopped eating, lost weight, my skin was ashen and gray, my eyes sank into the sockets, and my hair became so brittle. Even worse, my personality was not there anymore, I was only functioning to get money to get more opioids to prevent getting sick.

### Turning it all around

My family tried to get me into treatment programs, but as soon as I started feeling the symptoms of withdrawal, I would sign myself out. Finally, things changed right after my 19th birthday. I was living with a gang, had warrants out for my arrest in four counties, and had destroyed almost every meaningful relationship. My absolute lowest point was when I drove to a rural town and tried to intentionally overdose on multiple drugs. I had resigned myself to the idea that I was going to die addicted to drugs. There was no hope or fight left in me. That night I should have died, but instead, I woke up cold and confused in my car the next morning. It was then that I decided to stop running. I went home to my mother, where she hugged me tight, told me she loved me, and called the cops. I was arrested in my kitchen and taken to jail.

After months of withdrawal symptoms while incarcerated, I finally felt like my mind was clearing up. Thanks to recovery resources and wonderful support from peers and counselors, I realized that I didn't have to live that way anymore; I realized recovery really was possible for me. This was not the end of my journey; I had to climb out of a really big hole. With the burden of legal expenses, lack of education, strain on the relationships in my life—I had a lot to heal and repair as I moved forward with my life.



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## Sharing my story

So many amazing people helped me through my recovery process, making me feel like I was worth getting treatment and really living a good life. Because of this experience, I work to support others on their addiction and recovery journeys. I know how disheartening it feels to have people judge and stigmatize you. I am hoping to use the insights I've gained in the last 10 years of recovery to give others the same hope and encouragement I received. I know how profound it can be to have people share their own experiences with you, knowing that they may have gone through even worse, yet are living full lives.

Now, I work to let people know that no matter what they have done, there is so much life left to live.



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