

# James' Story

Growing up in foster care was a difficult time for me. From an early age I never felt like I belonged or was loved. I felt that I was different from the other kids. At first I got involved in sports and for awhile I had found the love I was looking for because I had become really good. In fact, I even received attention and praise from all over the state. About 11 or 12 years of age I became involved in drugs and gangs. By the time I was 13 I had become engulfed in the gang and criminal lifestyle. It was then that I went to my first treatment program. I didn't identify with being an addict so naturally I drove deeper into the gangs. I managed to get by in school and sports but I was still hanging with the gang crowd. Fights were normal and using drugs is what we did.

*“I am learning how to deal with life one day at a time.”*

Eventually I was sent to Oregon from Minneapolis, Minnesota because I had become too much trouble. Once in Oregon I naturally found the sports crowd and then the using crowd and then eventually back to the gangs. In a span of three months I won State Basketball Championship as well as got sentenced to 20 years in prison for a gang related crime. I was 17 years old and was able to get out of prison in 10 years. It wasn't long before I was back to using drugs in order to cope with the shame and guilt of throwing my life away. Since then I have had four children, three girls and one boy; I have been to six more treatment programs, and a return to prison. April 27, 2010 is when life began to change. I went to yet another treatment program which was the Community Corrections Center treatment dorm. I completed aftercare and moved into clean and sober living. I got a job and then began repairing my spirit. Eventually I became a house manager and now have been given the opportunity to be a Recovery Mentor with Bridges to Change. Life is getting better. Recovery for me is awesome! I am learning how to deal with life one day at a time. ~James D.