



COUNSELING NEWS

SPRING 2019

SHAHID'S STORY

YMCA CLIENT TELLS STORY OF RECOVERY THROUGH ARTWORK

"I was raised in Memphis, Tennessee with my brother by a single mother. My family was the type of family that did drugs and drank, it was just always in their lifestyle. Growing up, my first experience with alcohol was when my grandparents and uncles would go to bed at 8 o'clock in the morning with their cups and bottles of alcohol everywhere. My cousin and I would always drink from those bottles because we were curious about what the adults were drinking. We wanted to know what it felt like.

As I was growing up, I started hanging out on the streets with drug dealers; it wasn't that I wanted to, but I was just curious about the lifestyle they lived. At a young age, I started selling drugs and stealing cars. By age 11, I was going in and out of juvenile facilities. From 13 to 19 years old I was incarcerated. I believe being in jail matured me. I learned how to read and I started to draw and paint cartoon characters like Bart Simpson and Bugs Bunny. I didn't know it when I was in there, but while I was in jail my character and perspective on life were being shaped. When you're in jail, you can't show weakness or cry, but recovery teaches you that you should cry, so being in jail I didn't realize that I was developing these false beliefs. When I got out of jail at age 19, I was lost. Before I went in, my friends were riding bikes and skateboards and being kids; when I got out, those same friends had cars, apartments, children, and I was trying to grasp the reality of it all. I realized when I got out, I didn't know how to function. When I was in jail, my goal wasn't to come out and get a job or have a family, settle down, do the right thing. My goal was to keep selling drugs. So, my first couple of weeks out I got a job, but I only worked for about a month before going back to selling — what I knew best.

At age 21, I got shot in my head in a gang-related drive-by shooting; I lost my right eye. My friend got shot and became paralyzed. At this point, I was just drinking and smoking marijuana, but I was selling a lot of cocaine; I couldn't see that I was on the road to destruction. When I got shot, I had money and cars, but the reality was that I couldn't even use them to help me or my friend who was on life support from the shooting. That's when living life on the streets changed my perspective. I realized I didn't want to die.

The shooting had caused post-traumatic stress disorder. From age 21 to 23, I was going through a phase of depression, and I started using cocaine. I knew it was wrong because I understood what cocaine did to people. At this point in my life, I had lost all my dignity. I didn't love myself anymore. Now homeless, I started doing the things that I'd seen addicts do—stealing, panhandling, asking for change, living in shelters, going to rehabs, going to psych wards—it was a totally different life.

I started going to rehabs, but I didn't understand that I had a disease. I thought if I just stopped doing drugs, I could get back to the life I wanted to live, but I didn't know that my thinking and my behavior was causing me pain. I would get clean, but I would go back to hanging around drug dealers not realizing that even though I wasn't using drugs anymore, I was still surrounding myself with the lifestyle. From age 23 to 30, I was in and out of rehabs, psych wards, jails—I was going state to state, running from myself. I would go to a new city, get back on my feet, and do well, but my behaviors didn't change. When you want to change, you have to change everything.

From age 30 to 35 I was still going in and out of rehabs, but now I was looking for a way out of it all. When I started getting sponsors, I did a lot of looking within myself, and I started to realize that I couldn't love myself because of the things I was doing. I got clean for 7 years. I got my GED, went to college, did things that I didn't think were possible for a person who came from the streets. When I was in jail, I used to dream about going to college for art. After the 7 year period, I started to realize that the longer I stayed clean, the more responsibility I had to take on, and I self-destructed. I started using again and I went back to living on the streets or in shelters. It was hard to get back up from how far I fell.

While I was still using, I decided I wanted to come back to New York (after being here 10 years prior) to go back to school for animation. I decided to move to Staten Island, where I didn't know anyone. I made the first attempt to go away in July 2018 but when the program came to get me, addiction kept me in my house. After I made a second attempt to go, my mom encouraged me, but I thought I could just stop using on my own. When I realized I couldn't do it alone and that I needed help, I started looking for treatment, and that's how I ended up at the YMCA Counseling Service.

Today I'm nine and a half months clean, I go to meetings every day, I talk, share my story in meetings and in schools. I used to think if I told someone I had thoughts about using again, it meant I was weak; now I know that if I tell someone, I'm working the program. It's an everyday battle for me; the challenge is to wake up every day and see the good when your mind is telling you otherwise. Going forward, I have a lot of big plans for my art. I've published several comic books and coloring books all based around youth, drugs, bullying, education, and telling the stories of people that I've met throughout this journey. One of my main goals is to make an animated movie with the characters I've created. When I create a character, I think of people I was in the streets with and I tell their story so that whoever reads my books knows that these characters are real. I feel like I honor those people by telling their story. I thank the Y for guiding me on my path and helping to give me my life of possibility back.



YMCA COUNSELING SERVICE

South Shore Center, 3911 Richmond Avenue
Staten Island, New York 10312 (718) 948-3232

North Shore Center, 285 Vanderbilt Avenue
Staten Island, New York 10304 (718) 981-4382

OPEN INTAKE HOURS *NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY*

South Shore Center (3911 Richmond Avenue)

Monday 1:30PM – 3:30PM
Wednesday 4:00PM – 6:00PM
Friday 3:30PM – 5:30PM
Saturday 10:30PM – 12:30PM

North Shore Center (285 Vanderbilt Avenue)

Tuesday 1:30PM – 3:30PM
Thursday 4:00PM – 6:00PM

WHO WE ARE

The YMCA Counseling Service is a comprehensive outpatient chemical dependency program providing prevention, treatment and recovery services to children, adolescents, adults and their families. It also serves as an immigrant resource center, providing vital services such as ESOL and Citizenship Preparation classes through its New Americans Welcome Center.

OUR SERVICES

- ◆ Assessment Services
- ◆ Individual Counseling
- ◆ Group Counseling
- ◆ Family Therapy
- ◆ Psychiatric Services
- ◆ Addiction Medicine Management

ENJOY THIS ISSUE?

Feel free to share this newsletter with anyone you think may find it useful.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR IDEAS?

Contact Anna Bagliore, the editor, at abagliore@ymcanyc.org.

AN EVENING OF HOPE, IMPACT, & RECOVERY

FIVE HUNDRED ATTENDEES GATHER TOGETHER TO HEAR CHRIS HERREN'S INSPIRATIONAL STORY OF ADDICTION AND RECOVERY WHILE HONORING LONGTIME YMCA VOLUNTEER, CELIA IERVASI



MEET OUR STAFF

Meet our 2018 YMCA Superior Performance Award Winners!

On May 1st, 2019, over 70 YMCA staff members from all five New York City boroughs were awarded a 2018 Superior Performance Award for their unwavering leadership and dedication to the YMCA's mission.

The YMCA Counseling Service was proud to honor three staff members at the Second Annual Recognition Brunch at the Wythe Hotel:

- Meredith Connolly - Counselor
- Christie Yates - Hospitality Agent
- Anna Bagliore - Communications Assistant (South Shore YMCA & YMCA Counseling Service)

Congratulations to our Superior Performance Award winners! Thank you for commitment to the YMCA and for the impact you've made in our community throughout the years.

"After spending 113 days in rehab, I was asked where I wanted to do outpatient. Without hesitation, I said the YMCA Counseling Service on Staten Island. I couldn't see myself continuing this journey anywhere else. All of the staff at the Y helped me tremendously over the next 10 months. It's easy to stay clean when you're away at rehab or in a controlled environment. The real test is when you get home and have freedom again. If it weren't for the staff in place at the Y, I'm not sure I would have made it. Today, I can proudly say I have 15 months clean and sober without a substance."

-John, YMCA Counseling Service client and testimonial speaker at the 39th Anniversary Celebration

On Thursday, May 9th, the YMCA Counseling Service held its 39th Anniversary Celebration at the Hilton Garden Inn. Returning, due to overwhelming request, to share his moving story of addiction and recovery was former Boston Celtics Player turned motivational speaker, Chris Herren.

Chris Herren was a high school basketball legend from Fall River, Massachusetts, who realized his lifelong dream of playing for the Boston Celtics only to lose it all to addiction. Since starting his recovery journey in 2008, Chris has been committed to helping others by sharing his story with audiences in schools, professional sports organizations, corporations and communities across the country. His inspirational speeches draw on his own real-life experiences to convince audiences that it is never too late to follow your dreams, and that it is possible to overcome your setbacks and start making the right choices. Over the years, Chris has established multiple organizations that provide support and resources to those affected by addiction and stress the importance of a healthy, substance-free lifestyle. His organizations consist of Herren Talks (est. 2009), Herren Project (est. 2011), and Herren Wellness (est. 2018).

The event also honored Celia Iervasi, Associate Broker at Casandra Properties, Inc. and longtime YMCA volunteer. Celia is a determined advocate for the Y, who embodies the values of our work and speaks our mission to everyone she encounters. She has served in several volunteer leadership roles, has recruited multiple key board members, has helped to develop strong relationships with elected officials and is a consistent advocate for the Annual Campaign. Celia is a true champion of the YMCA's Counseling Service. Aside from the work she does for the Y, she also volunteers for several other community groups and organizations, such as the Verrazano Kiwanis Club, Sunrise Day Camp and Northwell Health.

The event served as a fundraiser as well as a participant and volunteer recognition ceremony, providing the organization with an opportunity to educate the community about the addiction, recovery, prevention and immigrant services it offers. Individuals making progress toward their goals, sustaining their

recovery, making life changes and those that are completing addiction treatment were honored and recognized for their accomplishments.

We would like to thank all our sponsors and attendees for supporting the Y Counseling Service's mission by joining us at our 39th Anniversary Celebration. The positive impact we continue to have on our community would not be possible without your help.

