A Path through the Pain

Joseph Brooks

BEFORE YOU READ:

1) What have you learned from painful experiences? What skills have you gained? Could you use them on your career path?

2) Read the box below to make sure you know what LGBTQ stands for.

Trauma and Poverty

I have never had a comfortable life. I grew up in poverty, wearing hand-me-downs. In my life, I have been through many traumatic situations common to LGBTQ youth who experience neglect and abuse. I lived a life of drugs and criminal behaviors which was my way to cover up my sexual orientation. Now, being six months clean from drugs and crime, I know what I’m meant to do with my life and my career.

A Voice for My Community

I want to be a substance abuse counselor. I want to help addicts learn that there is a positive way out of the shadows of this disease and into the light of numerous possibilities. I want them to learn that it is possible to get the love and support they need to succeed in whatever they choose as their career path.

LGBTQ stands for...

Lesbian: women who love and are attracted to women
Gay: men who love and are attracted to men
Bi-sexual: people who are attracted to either sex
Transgender: people who are a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth
Queer: formerly an insult, queer is now a term that describes anyone outside of rigidly defined gender/sexuality “norms”

See the “Reclaiming Wholeness” section (pp. 17-28) of Issue #44 of The Change Agent for more definitions and discussion.
I want to help them learn these things before they learn the hard way—by being put in prison or an institution, or suffering a terrible ordeal. I want to provide outlets so that they can be their better selves. I want to “pay it forward” and be an advocate for these young people.

My Career Path
While I am serving my prison term, I am staying away from drugs and the people who use them behind the wall. I am attending substance abuse classes taught by my role model, Walter R. He gives me resources so I can learn how to become a licensed addiction counselor. He also advises me on finding grants and scholarships that I might be eligible for. I have taken a Sociology class and earned three college credits. These credits will go toward an undergraduate degree in Behavioral Sciences and Addictions. Most important for my career path is my personal experience with addiction. That is something they can’t teach you in textbooks.

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To all the people out there reading this, remember: There is more to life than drugs and wild nights. Find the people out there who are positive and supportive of you moving forward in your life. Befriend those people. Stick with them!

Joseph Brooks was recently released from the Worcester County House of Corrections, and he now lives in Boston, MA. He is a sincere, goal-oriented individual with a passion to help those who are struggling with addictions. He wants to be a role model for LGBTQ youth so that he can finally give back.

A Peer Specialist Has “Been There! Done That!”

According to the article, name four specific experiences that Joseph Brooks has that will prepare him for his career path.

Look at the checklist on p. 19. List some more skills that Joseph Brooks might have due to past experiences. How would these help his work as an addiction counselor?

Why do you think it might be true that people working with peers report:

- Improved quality of life
- Decreased depression
- Better relationships with providers
- Less substance abuse
- Higher rates of employment

Source: www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/peer-support-get-facts