



Giving Back



Miguel

The ATR program “meant everything” to Miguel. When he arrived at ATR, he says, “I really didn’t have any guidance or anything. The program really stepped up and gave me a hand.” Soon, he was learning about the job opportunities that would be open to him as he committed to making positive changes in his life. He was interested in the building trades, so ATR staff educated him about union work and a pre-apprenticeship program offered through ATR. It is called Building Pathways.

Through Building Pathways, ATR helped Miguel get the license he needed to get hired constructing a new casino, and then staff supported him as he returned to work. He realized that he could not have accomplished this turnaround without his own hard work, but that he also could not have done it without ATR. Miguel recalls, “Any time I had a question they would help – where would I be without that?”

His experiences with ATR made him want to give back, and to help other people with their own recovery. A few years ago, he traveled with the ATR project director, Rebecca Starr, to the Washington, DC, area to participate in a meeting of the National Advisory Council of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. He describes being part of the recovery discussion at the federal level as “a great experience.”

Today, he meets with people transitioning from incarceration, because it is important for people in that situation to have a role model they can relate to. He remembers not being able to relate to people who

did not share his experiences of problem drug use, struggling to survive, and being incarcerated. “Any time I have the opportunity to talk with others, I never say no. I’ll always do it. If I can change one person’s life, ‘Amen’ to that!” he says.

With Miguel’s busy life, it is impressive that he finds so much time to help others. His credentials have helped him stay busy working full-time in the construction industry. He has also bought two houses, one of which he uses to earn rental income. Even with his great successes, Miguel is happy that ATR still checks up on him occasionally. “It’s pretty cool,” he says.

Miguel acknowledges the important role that ATR has played in helping him gain success. But he also reminds people that there is no easy solution to life: “ATR gives you the time you need to achieve recovery. You really have to want it and have a good support system and not quit before you’re ready once you start doing better. You can’t forget about the work and quit.”



Chris

Chris, a former ATR client, is now working, attending college, and raising a young daughter. He is a recovery coach for AllWays Health Partners, helping others recover from addiction. He is also studying for a BS in Human Services part-time at the Springfield College–Boston, with tuition assistance from his employer. Yet, he still finds time to be a big part of his two-year-old’s life—an opportunity he says he missed with his older children because of his past drug use and legal troubles.

A few years ago, it might have been hard to imagine his current life. In his youth, Chris had sold drugs. For a while, he was addicted only to the money he was making. Then, experimentation with drugs gave way to addiction. He progressed to stronger drugs, including heroin. Disappointed in himself, he decided to quit using drugs. Determined to succeed, he was able to stop on his own and did not use hard mind-altering substances for 12 years.

But then, something unexpected interrupted his recovery journey—a back injury. Despite his history, he was prescribed pain medications. As happens to so many people, he became addicted to the opioid medications and went through another three years of addiction.

This time, Chris would need help to stop using drugs. He considers himself fortunate to have been placed in a good drug court program. In addition to treatment, the court assigned him a recovery coach. One of the ways she helped Chris was referring Chris to the ATR office.

When he first got to ATR, Chris's top priority was getting money for clothing and transportation. ATR gave him that, and much more. While at ATR, he learned about the Paths to Empowerment (P2E) program, a job readiness program, which helped him address some of the challenges that were getting in the way of success. P2E helps people identify job opportunities, develop resumes, and practice interviewing.

Because he had some background in culinary work, Chris chose to apply to the ATR CBI Program that trains people for work in the culinary field, Community Servings, a local nonprofit organization that helps prepare nutritious meals for Bostonians in need. Community Servings also trains people who have barriers to employment. In the Teaching Kitchen program, trainees get hands-on experience in culinary skills while preparing meals for Community Servings clients.

Although his recovery ultimately inspired a different career path in counseling, Chris credits P2E for helping him achieve success. He says that P2E gives people a sense of purpose and helps them understand who they are—and who they can be. He also learned that people need support to achieve their dreams, and ATR provides the support that so many people are lacking.

ATR has made a lasting impression on Chris as he pursues his studies in Human Services. In fact, an ATR staff member and he were even classmates in the UMASS-Boston Addiction Counseling Education Program that he took immediately after completing the Community Servings P2E program! For a class project at Springfield College last semester, students were asked to reinvent a human services organization. Chris based his project on ATR and looked at ways to expand ATR services to additional parts of the commonwealth and obtain grant funding for this expansion.

In Chris's mind, recovery is all about “hope, perseverance, and love.” His message for others in recovery is “be open to all the experiences that recovery has to offer and don't give up on yourself.” Success did not come overnight for Chris. It came out of hope, perseverance, and love, along with the support that he found from ATR, Community Servings, his recovery coach, and others. Today, Chris is thankful to be “able to show up for life and the people that I care for, live my passion, and give back, after learning so much from other people who cared enough to show me the many ways to achieve recovery