

Meet Rick Williams

Board Member, Action Alliance Foundation

When Rick Williams was asked to serve on the Board of Directors for Action Alliance Foundation, he quickly said yes. "I've referred many people to Action Alliance over the years," he explained. "I like seeing miracles and love hearing everyone's stories - what they've overcome, what they're doing now – it's very impactful. It's exciting to see people embrace the power of recovery."

Rick had his first taste of alcohol at age 11, discovering marijuana just a few years later. He started ditching school and was kicked out of two traditional high schools, eventually graduating from an alternative high school. He was also in and out of Juvenile Hall, doing "dumb stuff."

It was during one of these stints in Juvenile Hall that Rick met his first wife, with whom he has three children. Together for 15 years, Rick worked steadily during this time, but would typically lose his job when he failed a drug or alcohol test.

Including his time in Juvenile Hall, Rick spent about five years in jail or prison for a variety of offenses. After one of his releases, he discovered his wife and children had moved to Utah – and he had no way of finding them.

Rick met his current wife Ellen shortly after. As a couple, however, they slipped into an 11-year period of chaos fueled by mutual substance abuse. It was during his last stint in jail, in 1999, when everything turned around.

Rick had his wake-up call on August 10, 1999, and has been sober ever since. "I had a moment of clarity that day that I'd never had before," he explains. "And, it was also my oldest daughter's birthday."

Picked up from jail in the wee hours of the morning, Rick completed his initial phase of recovery at Cooper Fellowship, learning to take things one day at a time. He soon learned that Ellen was also in recovery – her sobriety date is 30 days after his own. Ellen and he reconnected, but at the behest of their respective sponsors – and AA guidelines – they did not date again for a full year.

Rick began working again, initially as a fork lift operator for a computer company in Irvine (ironically, it was a company he had tried to steal computers from just a few months earlier – it turns out the company owner was aware of this but had a heart for those in recovery). Six months later, Rick became a cook at Woodglen Recovery Junction, eventually becoming a counselor there. He reconnected with George Folk – then serving as board chair for Woodglen – during this time as well (he'd initially met George when both were serving time in jail).

After five years at Woodglen, Rick was recruited to work at Cooper Fellowship, a recovery program in Santa Ana. He's worked at Cooper for 18 years, is a Certified Addiction Specialist, and currently serves as a senior staff member.

Ellen and Rick married in 2005 (he proposed to her in a hot air balloon flying above the City of Fullerton, and they celebrated their union with a big wedding). They have five children and six grandchildren between them. After losing touch with his own kids for about eight years, Rick is now in touch on a regular basis, and was even able to walk his oldest daughter down the aisle at her wedding a few years ago. Ellen and Rick enjoy going to the movies, taking road trips (including trips to see the grandkids in Utah), and have reconnected with Ellen's family as well. "I'm even considered the favorite son-in-law now!" Rick exclaims.

Over the years, Rick has touched many lives through his work at Woodglen, Cooper Fellowship, and participation in AA. He and Ellen also co-managed an Action Alliance house for several years. "I've learned to mourn, to love, to be compassionate and to be accountable," says Rick. "And, I've learned to walk through life with dignity."