

Next Step Staff Stories: Hogan England



Hogan's Story of Hope

My name is Hogan England. I grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee, and I now reside in the peculiar little city of Asheville, North Carolina. I love it here, and I couldn't really ask for more than what I've got in my life today. My life had always been a good one; the people around me loved me, and I had nothing but ample opportunities waiting for me. However, there was a part of me that felt empty for some reason. There was a part of me that didn't care what life had to offer. I began to chase something to fill that emptiness. One thing I've learned in the recent past is that it's possible to survive any and all of our mental, emotional, and spiritual pain. It wasn't until about a year ago that I realized the actual capacity of how significant everything and everyone around me was. Most importantly, I began to realize how important I was, contrary to what I had believed for the few years prior.

When I got high for the very first time, I had no idea what was to come of the next handful of years. Something that started as a desire to fulfill this curious space in my head eventually turned into this nagging, incessant need to feel different. It ultimately ended up in silent desperation. I won't go into details here, as this is meant to be a message of strength and hope, but I was in no way comfortable with how I was treating myself. I lied, I neglected my well-being in every way possible, I stole, I was manipulative, and I was completely void of compassion for any other human being. I was self-centered and self-medicated. I really had no idea if I wanted to be alive or dead. Every single day I would wake up and wish that everything could just be normal. Some days I wished I had not even woken up. I was apathetic to say the least. Most of all – I was scared.

When I was twenty years old there was one particular, incredibly dreadful night during which I basically blew the lid off of the monster

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that had been building inside of me for some time. Not long after, my father and I had a talk which ended in him asking me if I was in need of some type of help for my problem. That was a pinnacle moment in my life; I had no idea how drastically my life was about to change.

I went to a treatment center in Orange County, California. I didn't stay out there too long before I was kicked out due to some poor choices. I then relocated to a place in Asheville called Next Step Recovery. The amount of change I have experienced while in Asheville has been unmeasurable. The people I've met on the way have been exceedingly helpful throughout the process. Next Step has provided me with a safe environment to stay while I go about making these kinds of changes. Next Step is a family before it is a recovery house. It's a community with a population made of men fighting the same battle.

Being a part of a program of recovery is about breaking through those dark clouds that have been lingering over you for years so that you can find yourself above the horrors and depravity of active addiction. It takes a lot to do so, and the work it takes is very rigorous to say the least. It can be excruciating sometimes. But nothing is more agonizing than what we go through in our minds throughout addiction. It seems to me like getting clean wasn't too difficult. But staying clean has been a different story.

Recovery is beautiful. It's like catching a breath of air when you were almost certain that you were drowning. For me, the best part of recovery is that I learned that I can't do everything on my own; more importantly, there's no amount of turmoil I have to go through on my own. One of the biggest ways I stay clean today is by staying in touch with that fact. I know that other people either feel the same way that I do about certain things, or they have felt it before. I always have someone to talk to about whatever is on my mind; and the more people I get to know, the more chances I have of finding someone who can relate to me. There's strength in numbers when it comes to fellowship in recovery. If I have people to hold me accountable, then I have less room to make excuses and try to avoid reality.

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Another thing that has been elemental in my recovery is patience. Patience is one of many spiritual principles that are crucial in the recovery process. I have to learn to take things one day at a time. Spirituality is something that I never thought would be a part of my life, but recovery has led me into a whole new thought process. I had to first open my mind to new ideas, and then I was able to begin learning and applying to areas of my life things such as acceptance, honesty, and willingness.

Dealing with somebody who is going through the struggles of active addiction is tricky. Being the one on the painful side of the relationship between one person and a drug addict, I can tell you that an addict will not give up on the substance until it has broken them down to the point of desperation – that is if they make it there alive. I never imagined that what I was going through was something that I would never be able to pull myself out of. Luckily, I have a family that loves me unconditionally, and my father so compassionately asked me one day if I was in need of help. If I had not accepted that offer, I can't possibly imagine where I'd be right now. Addiction is something that is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually taxing. An addict will act on self-centered, obsessive impulses. It is nearly impossible to convince somebody that they are an addict; they have to come to believe it themselves. After that, it is possible for them to become willing to admit defeat and accept the help they so desperately need. The best piece of advice I could lend to somebody dealing with a loved one caught in the midst of substance abuse is this: love them from a distance. Addicts are masterminds of self-sabotage and manipulation. Sometimes the best thing to do for them is to let them hit the bottom so that they have nowhere to go but back up to the top.

The gifts of recovery are ample in quantity as well as quality. I have gained so much insight to the inner workings of my own true self. On top of that, I have gathered the ability to actually be present throughout life. I've picked up many blessings while blazing this trail of self-discovery. I now know how to recognize when somebody loves me, and I am learning to love myself as well as others in the most genuine way possible. There is no addict out there who is suffering

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that does not deserve a chance to live clean. I believe every human being is capable of making changes where they are possible; I used to not even believe this about myself. Recovery has given me the chance to live two different lives in one single lifetime. I am forever grateful for how my life has turned out today.

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