

## Next Step Staff Stories: Aaron Pruitt



### ***Aaron's recovery story:***

I grew up in upstate South Carolina on a beef farm with a loving family. I studied chemical engineering, eventually received a degree in Classical Music Theory and Composition, toured in a band for 10 years, became a global business owner, and married and had children. I have been very blessed and am grateful. However, none of those facts helped me recover from active addiction.

My recovery story is not a straight line and is peppered with lengthy abstinence, relapses, and other issues. I sometimes ponder what it would have been like to have been able to improve my quality of life simply by putting down substances. But, that is not my story. I use the word "substances" instead of naming specific chemicals because the form of the addiction is not what keeps me dependent and in an unmanageable state. However, if you've heard of it, I've probably abused it. In addition to my addiction, from an early age I have lived with a continuing and progressive mood disorder that eventually became compounded by the substance use in my adulthood. Five years ago I began my formal journey into recovering from addiction. At the same time, I also began to learn that my mental health played an equally important role in my ability to achieve a life free from addictions with the peace that makes recovery such a gift. I feel it is important to stress that in my story, recovery from substances and continually working on my mental health go hand in hand. It is not feasible for me to let up on either part of my work.

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***How Aaron came to Next Step:***

In May of 2015, I admitted myself to a psychiatric facility, having relapsed on substances and with declining mental health. I had become complacent before this relapse in both my 12 step work and behavioral work. I spent 2 weeks in the psychiatric hospital, received a diagnosis that finally made sense of the last decade, and was fortunate to find admission upon release into a dual diagnosis treatment facility. During my time at that treatment center I found out about Next Step Recovery and was attracted to the program because it includes therapy, life skills, and a focus on recovery as a whole life experience. I believe that I have to consider all aspects of my life as part of recovery.

As a resident at Next Step, I witnessed recovery in action with staff and senior residents. The structure gave me hope and the opportunity to improve myself with the freedom to take ownership of recovery goals and life choices. Through seeing others live the principles of recovery in everyday life I was afforded the gift of having faith in my own ability to do the same. I consider the chance to work as a staff member with Next Step to be another gift of the lifelong process of recovery. I believe that all we have learned and continue to do in recovery is truly valuable only when we share it with others and support them in their personal path.

***Aaron's advice for recovering addicts and their friends & family:***

The best advice I could offer to someone who wants to live a life of recovery is to stay hungry for a better life and keep working for it. The ultimate miracle of this process is we become more whole than we could ever believe was possible during our active addiction. Practicing the principles of the 12 Steps in all our affairs makes this possible.

***A little-known fact about Aaron:***

I once sang Christmas carols in Shanghai with an otherwise all girl Chinese group.

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***Advice from Josh:***

My advice for the client and family is to believe that recovery and long lasting change is possible. We do get better. At first you may feel overwhelmed and filled with guilt and shame about past actions, but I have personally witnessed many others develop and transform into self actualized men. When you realize how you can tap into your true human potential, utilize the tools Next Step teaches, and feel the love of your family and support network, recovery is then possible. You don't have to do it all on your own! Become involved in the community, learn to manage your emotional states, and find out what you are passionate about.

***Fun fact about Josh:***

I have an intense love for movies and have written a screenplay which is registered with the Writers Guild of America.

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