



Former Reentry Resource Center client Brian Evans uses his past to mentor peers towards community integration and recovery

[See Brian's video](#)



Brian Evans has spent most of his life in and out of prison. Once he was ready to break that cycle, he sought help at the County of Santa Clara Reentry Resource Center (RRC) which connected him with resources for both his immediate needs, like food, and his long-term ones, like employment. He took advantage of every opportunity provided to him including Goodwill of Silicon Valley's New Opportunity Work Program (NOW), funded by the RRC in San Jose. NOW offers participants immediate part-time employment in a variety of jobs within Goodwill. It also provides services such as resume preparation, job interview techniques and behavioral therapy. After 90 days NOW helps participants transition to full-time employment in the community.

After graduating from NOW Evans became an employee of the program working his way up to Lead Peer Mentor. His optimism, passion for helping people as well as his experiences with the criminal justice system helped him excel. He knows intimately how it feels to be estranged from family, addicted, and incarcerated.

Evans and his wife Lerissa enrolled in the free Criminal Justice Peer Mentor Certification Program offered at the Reentry Resource Center. It is a college credit program offered through San Jose City College. Students earn a peer mentor certificate in Alcohol and Drug Counseling. After graduating from that program, Evans is now employed full time as a Substance Abuse Clinician for Family & Children Services of Silicon Valley, a division of Caminar. He picks up clients from jail when they are released and helps navigate them to mental health services, supportive recovery residences, substance use treatment services, family violence prevention services, parenting programs and more.

"I love it," Evans says. "It's giving back. I get to give back everything that was given to me."

In addition to working full time, Evans and his wife Lerissa are both now enrolled at San Jose City College and are pursuing certifications as Alcohol and Drug Counselors. They both plan to transfer to four-year universities for Bachelor of Arts degrees. Evans hopes to eventually work for the County of Santa Clara Behavioral Health Services Department and wants to one day start a nonprofit expanding access to services for a greater number of individuals leaving prison.

It has been a long hard road for Evans and his family, but he is drawing on past experiences to make himself a critical resource for others like him. Reunited with his wife, young sons, and mother, enrolled in college, and working in a field he loves, Evans says he feels like he is finally home.

"I'm living whole with a pay it forward mentality."