

A YOUTH IN RECOVERY TRANSFORMS HIS LIFE

Growing up, Nigel had a loving and supportive family. He grew up with both parents solidly involved in his life and on his side. Externally, Nigel had all the things necessary to have a happy childhood and to be extremely happy and productive, with education as a huge priority to his parents.

“Internally, though, I just felt broken apart. It was like I didn’t fit in with anybody. I couldn’t pinpoint what it is – being one of the only Black children in my school. I was chubby and nerdy back then. I couldn’t pinpoint what it was that made me so different, but I knew that I felt that I couldn’t quite fit in with anybody.”

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When he hit puberty, Nigel took a different path.

“I wasn’t the short kid you could pick on anymore. I got a lot bigger and that immediately turned into violence. Before I dabbled with substances, I was just so full of rage.”

Rise Recovery, a United Way nonprofit partner participating in the Successful Students Impact Council, shares that the average age of first substance use in Bexar County is 13 years old.

When Nigel was 12, he was first introduced to substances by a friend at band camp.



“[The drug awareness programs at school] strengthened that muscle to say no to a stranger, but they never really strengthened that muscle to say no to a friend or to someone you looked up to.”

Even though he was a good student and graduated high school early, he often switched schools and was in and out of treatment due to violent tendencies and drug use.

Nigel’s adolescence was marked by trying to find the best to remedy what was going on in his head. Rise Recovery was the answer – where teens, young adults and families overcome the effects of drugs and alcohol and partner with the community in education and prevention.

“Getting into recovery was so beneficial to me. When I did, and I could finally see how my brain operated, free of substances and free of all the crazy things that happen in a teenager’s brain, I realized I had bi-polar disorder.”

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Once diagnosed, Nigel began getting a better handle on his feelings, learning how to express himself and healthy ways to cope.

However, Nigel still struggled to stay sober. When he was 20 years old, in treatment for the sixth time and at end of his rope, a former acquaintance took his own life. Nigel’s mom took him to the funeral.

“I was looking at his mother. And seeing him up there, no longer alive. When I tried to make a list of reasons why that wouldn’t be me, laying in that box up there, I kept coming up short. Living the life I was living and the way that my life was headed, I couldn’t come up with five reasons why that wouldn’t be me outside of a year.”

When he first arrived at Rise Recovery, he had no intention of stopping or getting sober. But his parents were receiving services, too, getting support and figuring out how to parent him.

“My parents were incredible, and I saw the pain watching them watch what I was going through. They couldn’t help feeling like they were to blame. They weren’t, but society is constantly telling us when your kid ends up using substances, it’s the result of poor parenting, and that’s so not the case.”

Nigel has now been in recovery for 7 years and currently works as a Youth Peer Recovery Coach at Rise Recovery.

“Rise hired me and that helped save my life.

It helped keep me tied to the program. Being 20-21 years old, and having been through addiction, my confidence and self-worth was not that high. Immediately being able to do life changing work and to help people and my community—help young people try to avoid what I’ve been through, that was a huge saving grace.”

Nigel describes his future as being beyond his wildest dreams.

“Now, whether it’s [my girlfriend], my best friends, my family – everyone in my life that I hang out with, are all hardworking and driving and supporting me to follow through on my goals. I’ve gotten to go further with my career than I ever thought possible, and I have my whole family back. My parents are there. My addiction took a huge toll on the family. Everyone felt it. I was the only one getting high, but everyone felt it in the household. My sister will call now and text me stupid jokes that are ridiculous, but there was a time when she didn’t want to talk to me at all. I got back everything that I had lost, and then I gained some.

I’m happy today. When I go to bed at night and when I wake up in the morning, I like myself. I love myself. And I can’t really put a price on that, but I know that I wouldn’t have that if it wasn’t for getting sober and for Rise Recovery.”

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