

The Reality of Recovery

Tonya Wheeler, CPFS

Executive Director

Advocates for Recovery Colorado

June 4, 2023

Childhood

- Born April 1968 in Texas
- Raised by both parents
- One sister, 4 years older



Adolescence



- 1980 @ Age 12 started drinking alcohol & smoking marijuana
- 1983 @ Age 15 – married/pregnant with first child – “Happy Little Family” fantasy
- 1984 @ Age 16 – Newborn (Marcie)
- Age 18 - First use of Methamphetamine

Consequences Begin

- September 1986 – 1st Treatment Center
My parents get custody of Marcie
- Daily Meth Use – nothing else mattered
- February 1987 Arrested for Possession of a Controlled Substance & Marijuana
Sentenced to 5 years probation (deferred sentence)
Never drug tested or evaluated for substance use disorder while on probation

Just Stop

- 1987 – Married Meth Dealer & Pregnant
- Not using Meth/Alcohol, but Marijuana use is ok
- Meagan is born January 3, 1988
 - “My Little Family” Fantasy Returns
- Six months of focusing on my family

The nightmare returns...

- Marijuana use continues & now I can drink since I'm not pregnant
- October 1988 - Returned to daily Methamphetamine use
- Estranged from family
- Marcie becomes the Mom in the family
- Children move in with grandparents

Addiction has Control

- Daily Drug/Alcohol Use
- Complete isolation from kids and family
- Unable to function with anyone outside the Meth community
- Hopeless, Helpless, Suicidal, Depressed
- Human shell with no emotion .. No Tonya Left

March 1989 – Treatment admission
in Greenville, TX – weighed 100 lbs



Recovery Begins

Outpatient Treatment

- IOP – 13 weeks
- Traditional OP & Aftercare (2 years)
- Attending recover support meetings
- Began a connection to others in recovery
- Tried successfully using Marijuana & Alcohol only



Healing Happens!

May 23, 1990

- ✓ Abstinent from drugs and alcohol & active in the recovery community
- ✓ Individual & Family counseling
- ✓ Divorced from dealer, with custody of both girls
- ✓ My girls start to learn to trust me
- ✓ Ability to trust
- ✓ Stable housing
- ✓ Open communication (no secrets)
- ✓ Family Recovery
- ✓ Recovery Friends & Support Groups (including kids)
- ✓ Family learns “It’s ok to ask for help”
- ✓ Mom’s experience helps us and others

My Family Today



Advocate for Recovery Colorado

No-Cost Peer Recovery Support Services to ANYONE regardless of stage of recovery or chosen recovery pathway.

Services Include:

- Peer Recovery Coaching
- Recovery Support Groups open to all
- Recovery Social Events to build new recovery friendships
- Annual Colorado Celebration of Recovery called “Rally for Recovery”
- Advocacy for the Recovery Community at the state and national level



AFRC Recovery Advocacy

ADVOCATES FOR RECOVERY COLORADO

Instagram.com/advocatesforrecoverycolorado

Twitter.com/@afrcolorado

www.afrcolorado.org



ADVOCATES FOR RECOVERY COLORADO

ONE STATE 1 VOICE

Recovery WE

ADVOCATES FOR RECOVERY COLORADO
RECOVERY AMBASSADOR ENGAGING LEADERS



The Voice of Lived Experience

- Colorado SUD Providers Assn (COPA)
- Recovery Community with CO Consortium of Rx Drug Abuse Prevention Faces & Voices of Recovery Board of Directors
- Faces & Voices of Recovery Public Policy Committee
- Colorado Opioid & Other Substance Interim Committee
- Colorado Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force
- Colorado Behavioral Health Planning & Advisory Council

Tonya Wheeler, CPFS

Executive Director

Advocates for Recovery Colorado

tonyawheeler@advocatesforrecovery.org

720-355-7722

www.advocatesforrecovery.org

