

I Needed Help to Stay Free in Prison

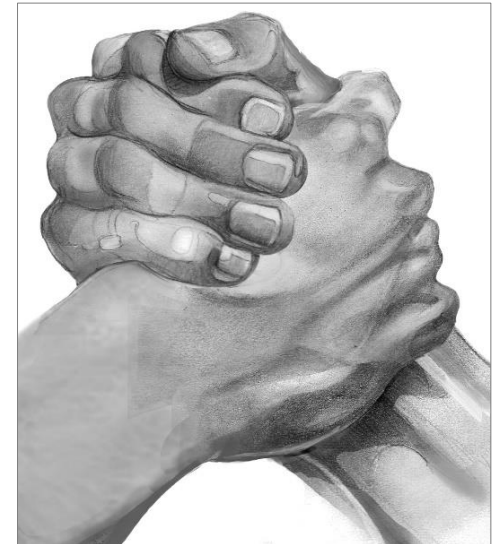
I was always a loner. As a teen, on the street, I only depended on myself. I think that got me into trouble. I cut myself off from healthy activities. I should have built a network of positive friends in high school. Then, when I went to prison, I found out that being a loner could be a double handicap. In prison, I finally realized that I needed to find others I could trust, and I needed to lean on them.



During that 1st year of incarceration, I was lost. I became a fiend: Every minute, I was either high or looking to get high. I knew I had to make a change. Prison is like living in a sewer. You need to wipe yourself off every day. I tried to rely on myself to do that but kept falling back into my old ways. Then one day I was invited to a support group and that's when things really changed.

At first, I sat in the back and just listened. But after a couple meetings, I could tell these guys were for real, so I spoke up and talked about my addiction. They understood me and they encouraged me.

Now I'm working the program and hanging out only with these guys (from the group). We stick together and keep track of each other. Today I'm clean and able to enjoy simple things like conversation and a cup of coffee. I learned to play chess and started pushing myself (working out) during rec. I also take time to pray every day. Since I'm not buying drugs anymore, I've been able to save most of the money my sister sends.



I know I could easily fall back into addiction, though. There are drugs around every corner. I need to stay alert and keep tight with my group. I know can't give up or feel sorry for myself. I'm making my future every day. When I walk out of that gate in 15 months, I will be free in *my mind* as well.

