



NEW BEGINNINGS



Bryan Etnel, Head of the Work Motivation Programme, New Beginnings/Foundation Chances for Life

"I am a new person and happy with my life. I am thankful that I can help people to come off the streets."

New Beginnings/ Chances for Life is a civil society organisation (CSO) in Paramaribo that operates a drop-in center for key and vulnerable populations - commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender persons, persons who use drugs, the homeless and migrants. They also provide services that range from HIV/STI education and clinical services (HIV testing and referral to clinics) to economic empowerment to their clients. New Beginnings/ Chances for Life addresses HIV through social determinants, such as substance use, alcoholism, homelessness and poverty, violence, and sex work.

Bryan Etnel was a smart child who did well at school. In fact, he boasts of his ability to speak English and his completion of high school. At the age of 12, he began living on the streets and at 18 he started doing drugs. He pensively recalls some of his experiences during that time, "my life took on a predictable pattern - I was in and out of prisons. I was a drug addict and a very bad drug addict at that. On the streets, everyone was afraid of me. I was a bad man. Even drug dealers had respect for me, everyone on the streets had respect for me." Bryan claims to have been imprisoned more than 200 times for using drugs, stealing, robbery, burglary, and violence. He was in a caught up in cycle that took him from the street to prison and back again, and he saw no way out.

While in prison, Bryan met Diamond, a transgender person who spoke with him about New Beginnings/ Chances for Life and how he could benefit from their services. During a subsequent visit by New Beginnings/Chances for Life to the prison, Diamond registered Bryan with the organisation. He benefited from their services - counselling, HIV testing, and nutritional support - while in prison, and on his release he was granted a place to sleep and live at the organisation.

Bryan served as a volunteer at the organization, using his personal experiences to counsel drug users. "I tell them about how I have stopped using drugs. I have stopped everything that was nice in my eyes and is probably nice in their eyes. I tell them about how I am now back with my family and how good that feels." Bryan started a support group for drug users and this evolved into the Work Motivation Programme. The Work Motivation Programme provides employment for many of the organisation's clients in the form of cleaning and maintenance of the onsite buildings and compound, furniture making, and planting the kitchen garden that supplies fresh vegetables to the organization's kitchen. The Work Motivation Programme also offers landscaping services to the neighboring communities as part of the organisation's income-generating activities. Bryan served as the Coordinator for the Work Motivation Programme for more than a year. He feels a deep sense of purpose and believes that this is helping drug addicts return to normal lives.



Bryan constantly reflects on the second chances he now has with his family. While Bryan did not grow up with his mother, his relationship with his father was not the best. He believes that when his father took ill this year he was given an opportunity to redeem himself. He shared, “my father had cancer. I was scared for him, but I made up my mind to be strong for him. I left the organisation every day, went to my father’s house, bathed him and fed him until the day he died.” This experience reinforced his resolve to be a better person. “One day when I visited my father, I realized that he was dying and that he waited for me. By then, I was already off drugs, but I promised myself that no matter what, I will never take drugs again,” he explained. Bryan is forever grateful to New Beginnings/ Chances for Life for being his strength, in what he described as one of the most difficult periods in his life.

“Because of New Beginnings/Chances for Life, I had the opportunity to serve my father and to make things right with him. I am at peace.”

Bryan has also mended relationships with his wife and children. He felt he was always an embarrassment to his wife because of his behaviour and reputation, but he very much wanted to be back with his family. New Beginnings/ Chances for Life worked to reintegrate Bryan with his wife and children. He shared, “my wife was very embarrassed of me, but she is a patient wife and I count my blessings for this. She is kind to me and doesn’t want our children to be raised by another person. She has given me another chance.” With the help of the organisation, Bryan initially spent weekends with his wife and two young daughters. Bryan is now fully integrated with his family, works full-time with the Work Motivation Programme, and plans to stay off drugs forever.

“I am a new person and happy with my life. I am thankful that I can help people to come off the streets. This could not have happened without New Beginnings/ Chances for Life.”



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