

Ken writes:

Hello. My name is Ken and I live in Tucson, Arizona. I wanted to share with you all of the positive changes that SMART Recovery is making in people's lives in Southern and rural Southeastern Arizona.

I began using SMART Recovery back in May of 2004 at the agency where I receive behavioral health services. I had been involved in NA for a few months, but it just wasn't right for me. I truly believe that spirituality plays an important role in a person's recovery, but in my case, when I began my addiction, spirituality was the first thing to go and one of the last things to come back. Therefore, I wanted something more engaging that would teach me to take responsibility for my own behavior and to provide me with the tools to make the changes. I found that and so much more in SMART Recovery. I was so profoundly affected by the program that I have made it my personal mission to spread the SMART Recovery message here in Arizona. I tell people that I am the "poster child" for SMART Recovery.

We have a program here that trains people in recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorders to provide peer support services within the public behavioral health system. It is called the Recovery Support Specialist (RSS) Institute. I graduated from the very first Institute that was offered in Arizona and am a Certified RSS. I co-facilitated the SMART Recovery training portion of that Institute and was invited back to be the facilitator for any future Institutes as part of the program curriculum. To date, I have provided SMART Recovery training to 80 individuals in five separate Institutes, with many more to come. From the Institute, these RSSs go to work at behavioral health providers and community service agencies in five different counties. This is how the message begins to spread. I have been invited to various programs throughout Southern and rural Southeastern Arizona to support and guide RSSs in developing their own SMART meetings/groups within their agencies and communities.

Even more exciting, SMART is the most popular and consistently attended group in a little town called Wilcox. The people there are reporting inspiring changes in their lives since joining the group. Recently, at a conference in Phoenix, I was invited to help develop a SMART Recovery group in Nogales. I am hopeful that this may be the first SMART Recovery group to be offered in English and Spanish.

We had a Recovery Expo in Tucson in September in celebration of National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month. All of the 12-step groups were represented and I made a point of offering SMART Recovery as another alternative for recovery from addictive behaviors. The response was inspirational. A priest from a local church attended my meeting because he said that he believed that even though God plays a crucial role in some peoples' recovery, the philosophy of "admitting powerlessness over addiction and turning it over to God", as is taught in the 12-steps meetings, was not working for the people that were coming to him for help. He believed that people themselves need to take responsibility for changing their own lives. It is moments like this that motivate me to keep on spreading the SMART Recovery message. In June of 2006, the United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association is having its 31st Annual Conference in Phoenix. I am looking very forward to presenting a SMART Recovery workshop there because there will be people from all over the world in attendance. What an awesome opportunity to encourage people to share SMART Recovery in their communities.

Thank you so much SMART Recovery for helping me to change my life in more ways than I can count. You have given me the courage to pursue the dreams that I had before I became addicted to drugs and alcohol and guided me in changing the many other addictive behaviors that came along with the disease. Furthermore, thank you for allowing me to bring about positive changes in my community and my state through educating others about the program that changed my life for ever.