

# The Press-Enterprise

## Commentary

### Anthony Martinez: A story of justice and recovery

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As our communities come together to celebrate National Recovery Month, I want to take a moment to share my personal journey. My hope is that by telling my story, I can help inform ongoing discussions about addiction and criminal justice, while offering some hope to those who struggle with addiction.

I am a recovered addict, and am proud to say I have been sober for almost five years. My recovery journey has been shaped by many factors, but a few stand out as the most important: my family, especially my daughter, who never gave up on me; my faith in God; the treatment programs like the one I attended at the Salvation Army; and, surprisingly, the justice system. In particular, I am deeply grateful for one of my probation officers who treated me with respect and compassion, seeing me as a human being.

My story, in many ways, is like countless others who have battled addiction. I had loving and supportive parents, but like many teenagers, I started experimenting with drugs and alcohol in high school. Unfortunately, my experimentation spiraled out of control and turned into addiction.

Over the years, I tried to get clean, but I found myself falling back into the cycle of addiction. By 2017, I was homeless, and my addiction had destroyed my relationships with the people I loved most, even leading my parents to file a restraining order against me. I didn't care whether I lived or died.

In 2017, I was arrested again. I spent five months in jail, and when I was released, I was assigned to a Riverside County Probation Officer named Lesa. Up until that point, I had strong distrust of anyone in the justice system. But Lesa was different. She didn't just want to make sure I followed the rules—she wanted to see me succeed in recovery.

Every time I saw Lesa, she would ask me questions that cut through the numbness and denial that had built up over years of my addiction. “Do you want your parents to see you clean?” she'd ask. “Do you want to walk your daughter down the aisle someday?” These were simple questions, but Lesa's persistence and genuine care started to break down the walls I had built up. She didn't let me off the hook for my mistakes, but she also didn't treat me like a lost cause.

The real turning point came after I overdosed on fentanyl-laced meth. My daughter called Lesa and begged her to do something. “If you don't act, my dad is going to die,” she told her.

Soon after, I was arrested again. This time, I could either go to prison for four years, or I could enter a treatment program through the Salvation Army.

I chose treatment, and it changed my life. The program was tough—it forced me to confront the root causes of my addiction, something I had been avoiding for years. I followed every rule, got a sponsor, and for the first time, I found the strength to stay sober, and rebuild my life.

My recovery has been about more than just getting clean; it's been about understanding the role of accountability in long-term success. I was held accountable but also given the opportunity to change, and that combination is what helped me turn my life around.

This accountability, coupled with treatment, didn't just save my life—it made our community safer. Addiction drives crime, and when people struggling with addiction get the help they need, we're all safer for it.

Now, I can truly say that I am thankful my daughter called my probation officer on me. I am also thankful that my probation officer wasn't just there to hold me accountable but also to guide, support, and show me a pathway out.

As we recognize National Recovery Month, I want to emphasize that drug treatment programs and probation systems that focus on accountability and rehabilitation do work.

Today, I am proud of the life I have built, and that I am now someone my family can be proud of.

I hope my story serves as a reminder that recovery is possible, no matter the odds.

Anthony Martinez is a Riverside County resident.

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