

JOSEPH'S STORY

HOW A COMMUNITY'S COMPASSION HELPED JOSEPH FIND HIS WAY BACK



Joseph's camp

FROM LIFE ON THE STREETS TO A PLACE TO CALL HOME: JOSEPH'S JOURNEY OF RECOVERY AND HOPE.

Joseph grew up in a loving home with his family, but his struggles with drug addiction and schizophrenia led to a life on the streets. Homeless for five years, Joseph faced many challenges—but when he looks back, he realizes he wasn't alone.

Many people were involved in his life: his family, the Folsom Police Department, the Folsom City Council, Doug Scalzi (who owns the building Joseph is now living in), and more. They got Joseph into the county behavioral health system so he could get connected with resources where he was then paired with Hope Cooperative's New Direction program.

Hope was able to support Joseph with housing, but for a long time, Joseph turned away the offer. Joseph lived in Folsom, but the available housing was in a different city,

and he just didn't feel comfortable living in an unfamiliar city.

In 2021, Bidwell Studios opened and Hope Cooperative was contracted to provide on-site services—right across the street from where Joseph usually camped. "When they said there was a place across the street, it was pretty enticing," Joseph said. "The idea of having a shelter, and just a place that I'm not kicked out from all the time—that sounded nice. So I was on board."

Joseph moved into Permanent Supportive Housing at Bidwell Studios in Folsom in June of 2021.

JOSEPH'S LIFE BEFORE HE WAS HOMELESS

Before he began smoking meth, Joseph was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 19. "I was just smoking weed all the time, even before I was homeless," he said, "and then I started hearing voices, being contacted, and just having random ideas and hallucinations."

"I was smoking weed with some guys I just met.

HOPE SHOWED ME WHAT TO DO EVERY DAY TO KEEP MYSELF OCCUPIED, HOW TO LIVE SELF-SUFFICIENTLY, AND SET GOALS FOR MYSELF.

We were passing a marijuana pipe around and somebody breaks out a meth pipe and starts smoking meth. He's like, 'Here, try this.' I'm already smoking a pipe with weed in it, so I didn't notice the difference that it was a meth pipe, and I take a hit, and I'm like, 'Whoa!'

"I was already high but then started having these delusions of supernatural occurrences for the majority of the day. I was perceiving weird things, until it got overbearing, and I couldn't escape it. That's when I was hospitalized. I wasn't able to take care of myself.

"It was kind of fun at first, and then it was happening so often that it was scary that I couldn't escape from it."

Joseph struggled to hold down a job and pay rent, and soon he found himself on the streets.

JOSEPH'S EXPERIENCE WITH HOMELESSNESS

"When I was homeless, I was either smoking a cigarette or weed or meth at all times," Joseph said, "or I was sleeping. And I'd eat like once a week or twice a week. I would sleep probably once a week, but mostly stay up all night and all day, rotating between cigarettes, weed, and meth."

Joseph describes some of his low points. "There were times where I'm like stuck in a bush, and my pants are soaked with pee, and I can't walk anywhere because it was too uncomfortable. And it's raining and cold, and I didn't know where to go. I struggled to stay warm, trying to light my cigarettes and stuff, and I just kind of made it through. Those were the worst times.

"But I had a lot of other times that were liberating," he added, "where I could just walk anywhere and I didn't have any commitments and got to have new adventures."

But it got old. And complicated.

"When I was on the street, I was able to handle hallucinations a little better—I wasn't as scared because I was kind of able to turn it off if it wasn't fun." Many of Joseph's hallucinations and delusions were frightening. "There were a few times in jail that were similar but different experiences, where we were underground, and it froze over. It's kind of hard to explain, but just real far out experiences that were convincing. And I would kind of freak out. And they weren't very pleasant."



Joseph moving into Bidwell Studios in June 2021

KINDNESS FROM STRANGERS, EVEN ON THE STREET

"People are pretty nice," Joseph said. "Once, I was breaking into some guy's car. And I didn't know, but he was on the side of his house working on another car. I opened the car door, and I took his pack of cigarettes. And then he was like, 'Hey, how you doing?' And then we talked for a while. He let me keep the cigarettes."

"I also had lots of great encounters with the police, where I'm running around naked, and they're trying to wrestle me down. Lots of times, they were totally understanding, and just wanted to help my situation."

JOSEPH'S FIRST TIME FINDING HOUSING WITH HOPE

Joseph was offered the opportunity to live at Bidwell Studios in June of 2021. Bidwell Studios was perfectly located in Folsom and allowed him to stay within his comfort zone, "When I first moved in," Joseph said, "I didn't have a lot of respect for it. I wasn't able to adjust and follow the rules and behave appropriately."

"Joseph held parties and did a lot of drugs while he was in Hope housing, and the people there with him literally destroyed the apartment," explained Annette, Joseph's mom.

Doug Scalzi, the landlord of Bidwell Studios reflected on Joseph's eviction, "I really did not want to do that, I liked Joe, and he just has that personality that you feel like there is something there and he can make changes. He was just struggling with the drugs." But Doug wanted to give him one last chance, so Doug made Joseph a deal, "If he was going to stay in his apartment, he had to go to rehab. It was Labor Day weekend, I changed my plans and stayed home so I could check on him."

Joseph successfully kept himself clean through the weekend, but he wouldn't go to rehab, and Joseph was evicted.

"Joseph was back on the street for about 4 months," Annette recalled. "So there was a lot that he had to do to actually prove himself to Doug before he let him back in."



Joseph enjoying time in the kitchen after reconnecting with his family

JOSEPH'S ROCK BOTTOM AND SECOND CHANCE

"It was tough going back to the streets," Joseph said, "from having a place to sleep, with a shower and a kitchen—from having all that to not having any of it. It was like, 'Oh, now I know what I'm missing out on.'"



Joseph with an animal friend

After a couple of months back on the street, Joseph hit rock bottom in the most kismet way.

Doug tells the story that one afternoon just before Halloween, "My friend paused while walking by my house and he came up to me and said 'There's a guy in your trash can'." Doug responded assuming that someone was digging through his trash, and his friend responded "'No, like ass-first, feet sticking out the top of your trash can! I thought you were playing a Halloween prank before I noticed the feet were moving.'" Doug couldn't believe it, "Joe had no idea where I lived, but out of all of the trash cans, he ended up in mine. Just sitting in there

smoking a crack pipe.”

After Joseph realized that one of his biggest advocates had seen him in possibly the lowest point of his life, he decided that he would do what he needed to get back into Bidwell Studios. Doug and Robert Johnston, from Hope Cooperative, had to both agree. “They wanted me to be sober,” Joseph explained. “I was willing to try sobriety and be sober as long as I was able to.”

Joseph reflects, “In my mind, I think I had to choose if I want to live in a house, or if I want to smoke meth. I made the decision that I would rather have a house and not smoke meth. So that’s what I told them, and after living in a room and board for about 60 days and showing I could stay sober, they agreed to give me a second shot.”

Joseph returned to Bidwell Studios in January of 2022.

JOSEPH’S JOURNEY TOWARD SOBRIETY

Although he was grateful to have housing again, Joseph didn’t quit drugs immediately. “There was about a year when I moved in here where I was kind of sneaky about it,” he explained. “It was just kind of hard to say ‘no’ sometimes.”

“I wasn’t looking to go out of my way to lose my housing, but it was still so available that it was hard to say no. So every once in a while, I’d still use it. But then I would just kind of be paranoid about taking care of my place and what I’m doing in my surroundings. So I didn’t really enjoy being high anymore, and I started thinking, ‘The next couple hours from now are going one of two ways. I can either smoke this and be high for the next couple hours, and risk eviction again, or I could say no and just go about my day.’”

So he started saying “no.”

“Hope showed me what to look for,” Joseph said. “They showed me what to do every day to keep myself occupied, and how to live self-sufficiently and set goals for myself.”



Joseph’s enjoying time in the sun



Joseph’s home at Bidwell Studios in June 2024

“Going from the streets to here, I had a lot of questions for Hope, like, ‘How can I go 12 hours without smoking meth?’ And they would give me a time schedule. One year at a time, one month at a time, one day at a time, one hour at a time. They taught me how to handle myself without smoking a cigarette and then not smoking another cigarette. They helped me break that chain.”

Having stable housing was a huge motivation for Joseph. After all the ups and downs of the past 5 years, he had a clear vision. He didn’t want to be homeless. It wasn’t worth it. “So I decided not to smoke meth anymore,” he said.

“At the time, I thought, ‘Oh I don’t really need to stop smoking weed, because nobody cares if you’re smoking weed all the time.’ But right when I stopped smoking meth,

I realized I didn't want to smoke weed anymore, either. Eventually I didn't even want to smoke a cigarette." Joseph will celebrate 2 years of sobriety in January 2025.

JOSEPH'S LIFE TODAY

"He's now eating healthy," Annette said proudly. "He's sleeping better. At the beginning, each of those things were a piece of this puzzle of getting him off the street and getting comfortable with being sober."

Joseph loves having a secure place to live, a home to rely on. He enjoys keeping it tidy, keeping his belongings safe, taking showers, cooking, and having pets.

"On the streets," Joseph explained, "I could camp somewhere for only a little amount of time before I had to move, and I wouldn't be able to move all my stuff with me all the time. So having a place where I know, 'My stuff is going to be here,' is a lot nicer. And I can make it all homey."

"Joseph now has fabulous animals that he loves," Annette added. "We have a family again.



Joseph's paddleboarding in Folsom Lake

Now he has relationships with his sister, his dad, and others who are important to him," she explained, "which he had not had for a long time. His life today is just so different."

Joseph has 7 fish, 4 cats, 4 hamsters, and a mouse. "At one point he had well over 100 mice in here!" Annette said.

"I had two mice in January and well over 100 by June," Joseph added.

"They multiply so fast!" Annette said. "So he donated them to a live wild animal sanctuary in Tahoe that use mice to train their birds and rehab them to hunt."

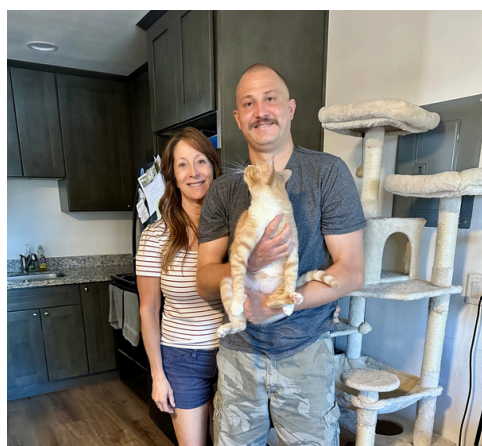
LOOKING TO JOSEPH'S BRIGHT FUTURE

"And I'm training for the California International Marathon," Joseph added. "That'll be early December." Joseph announced. "I start at the trail behind the hospital, I go to the lake, and I run down the river. I'm really hoping that I can run 26 miles by the end of the year! That's what I'm focused on. If I can do that, I feel like I can do anything."

"It's pretty amazing," Annette said, "to go from his not-so-distant past to now. He started off with 5 miles, then he went to 10 for a while, and yesterday it was 15. We all ran at the Wharf to Wharf in Santa Cruz this past July! We also went camping in July and have done many other fun things together."

Joseph also volunteers at the Folsom Zoo and at a horse rescue. "I like to clean and take care of the animals," he said. "I like to work behind the scenes. I'm working my way up to being responsible for what I like to do." He's also working to get his driver's license.

"Before, Joseph couldn't even have a conversation because he was coughing so much, from smoking so often," Annette remembers. "Now we have full



Joseph's and his mom, Annette in his apartment with Rufus

conversations and he's running 15 miles! It's amazing. I'm so proud of him."

"This is still a journey," she added. "He's still in it. But his village has been very big for a long time. Even when he was in his worst state, it was obvious he had a caring, compassionate heart. He was never violent or vicious with anyone."

"Hope has been a huge part of his journey, and he probably wouldn't be here without the police department and Doug Scalzi."

Doug admits "I did give him tough love, but I also showed that I really cared about him, and I believed in him. If you show someone you care and you really mean it, it makes all of the difference in the world...but it still takes time."

Joseph's family is so happy to have him rejoin family life, and Annette was delighted to share these pictures of Joseph's journey. "It really takes a village," she said.

