

# **“Addiction is the only prison where the locks are on the inside.”**

Dianna Jennings - USDA Rural Development, Arizona Blog,

Anne and Damien Browning share a passion and a calling. They also share an earlier life of addiction.

“If somebody told me years ago that I’d be where I am today I’d never have believed it”, Anne said. She and Damien now own and operate Steps To Recovery Homes (STRH), a non-profit housing project for addiction recovery in Cottonwood, Arizona.

Damien has been in recovery for 13 years now and Anne for nearly 28. Years ago, when they were in rehab, they each had seen so many addicts go through a cycle they themselves knew as well—rehab, back to addiction, jail-rehab, back to addiction, jail.

They realized that the key to breaking that cycle for themselves had been being in a home environment that facilitated recovery.

“We used our own experiences and those of other successful approaches to develop our program. This is an example-driven program, Anne explained. “We provide a safe, clean place for our people and we work on our continuing recovery along with our clients”.

The Brownings say that their success in helping addicts comes from getting to really know their clients, interacting with them, learning their life stories, supporting them...and also holding them accountable.

“Our clients come into the small group home setting together and form strong bonds to each other and to staff. They help each other make healthier choices.” She says that’s one reason so many who graduate from the program stay in touch.

The STRH model offers a place to live for 6-18 months. “Some folks come in and in six months they are ready to get out on their own,” Anne said. “Others finish the program and have no safe place to go. We offer additional time so they can make the move with housing and jobs lined up before they leave.”

Anne admits that day to day this work can be both physically and emotionally draining. She and Damien put in long hours and often without collecting any salary. “We have written off thousands of dollars for folks who have no insurance and couldn’t pay for any of the services”, but, she adds, “about the time we begin to feel overwhelmed we’ll get a call from one of our graduated clients saying something like “It’s my three-year anniversary of being sober”...and then we realize how much we love what we do.”

STRH now has a Re-Sale store in Cottonwood called Miracles Happen. It helps generate income to defray some of the costs for those who cannot afford the program. It also employs clients to work in the warehouse and the thrift shop. Angie Dickson manages the Miracles Happen store. She is a graduate of the program and a living testimonial to the positive impact of the program. The happy heart and ready smile she exuded as she interacted with customers and co-workers when I visited the store belies the darkness of her life before STRH.

STRH also have community events to help raise money to operate the program...and their job development classes allow clients to work off some of the fees.

STRH has homes for men and for women. Each client shares a room in a home or apartment. The homes that Steps To Recovery operate provide food, clothing, furniture, sundries, transportation and job skills development as well as “life coaching sessions”.

In 2018 USDA Rural Development made a \$400,000 low interest loan and a \$59,000 grant to Steps to Recovery Homes to purchase a 4-plex in Cottonwood that will house an additional eight clients. The funding is being used not only to purchase the facility but to also make necessary improvements. The project nearly doubles the capacity for housing for the non-profit. In 2018 STRH was named the Nonprofit of the Year by the Arizona Community Foundation of Sedona.

The partnership between USDA and STRH has been a productive one and one that continues to grow.

If you’d like a fun way to find out more about Steps to Recovery Homes, the annual Erase the Stigma Community Awareness and Educational Day and Behavioral Health and Addiction event will be held on Saturday, July 20 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Cottonwood Recreation Center, 150 S. 6<sup>th</sup> St., Cottonwood. The free event features, speakers, food and drinks, day passes to the Recreation Center and Exhibit Booths.

