



Making Change

Residential Programs

Wilbert Edwards

Program Completed:
TROSA

Triangle Residential Options
for Substance Abusers

Program Type:
Residential
Therapeutic Community

Address:
1820 James St.
Durham, NC 27707

Phone:
919-419-1059

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www.trosa.org

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nity-based programs .

People who graduate from a well-structured community-based corrections program are about half as likely to be rearrested.

Wilbert Edwards began using crack at 18 and continued for the next 20 years until he found a 2 year residential substance abuse treatment program and therapeutic community known as TROSA Today, Edwards works regularly as a chef. Because he completed two years at TROSA, Edwards' chances of future success have been significantly improved and are much greater than if he had spent those same two years in prison. Edwards' TROSA graduation ring serves as a constant source of pride and reminder of the distance he has come

Learning to Live a Structured Life - I was used to living however I wanted," Edwards says, "getting up when I wanted, eating when I wanted. I couldn't do that at TROSA. I had to get up at a certain time, work at a certain time and follow rules. That was a major change for me." And it was a change that had to be practiced over the two years Edwards was in the program. Edwards didn't become accustomed to it all at once; he had to learn to live within TROSA's structure.

Program dropouts are usually the highest during the first 30 days of any program. Edwards immediately faced many challenges during that period. At first he didn't want to take suggestions; he blocked people out and didn't want to talk. Still, he and the other new TROSA interns were glad to be at TROSA, because without it, they knew they could be dead or locked up for life.

Working a Job - TROSA employment was a major factor in Edwards' ability to change. Working in the kitchen "wasn't just a program," it was a real job and the kitchen crew was responsible for feeding around 100 residents each day.

Bad Dreams - In the early days of TROSA, Edwards had a lot of bad drug dreams. He dreamed that he was still out on the streets and when he woke up, he'd look to see if he had a rock of crack in his hand. Edwards says he thanked God when he realized he was still at TROSA. Gradually, the dreams got less frequent, but they presented a significant problem during the early days of the program.

Living with Family Nearby - Edwards' father lived 5 blocks from the TROSA residence. Edwards found himself thinking he could leave the program and walk right over to his father's home. TROSA helped him learn to counter those thoughts with other thoughts such as "I'm 44, what am I gonna do, smoke crack until I'm 70 and in a wheel chair?" He also thought about his good traits; he knew he had a good heart and tried to treat people like he wanted to be treated. He didn't want to keep living the way he had been.



Carolina Justice Policy Center

www.justicepolicycenter.org

Change makers



TROSA helped Wilbert Edwards battle Addiction, a chronic, relapsing disease.

Problems and Challenges - Edwards came closest to dropping out of the program after the woman he'd been dating also became a TROSA resident. She chose to drop out after just one month. Although Edwards had already been in the program four months, he felt like giving up when she left. He knew the kind of things she might do to get money for drugs and he didn't want her to return to that kind of life. He wondered if he should leave TROSA and help her out.

Willie Lane: A Mentor - At this point Edwards says he started "acting out." He didn't want to leave voluntarily, but if he got kicked out, then he wouldn't have to face the fact that he left on his own, which he realized was a bad idea. Willie Lane, the Chief of the Kitchen Department and a TROSA staff member who had also lived through addiction, was instrumental in Edwards' decision to stick the program out. "He sat me down and told me exactly what I was doing. He treated me like a son. He said he knew that I was upset because the girl had left and that I was thinking of going after her. He knew what I was going through and explained it to me. He encouraged me to stay, and I did."

Becoming a Crew Boss - There was never a time in the program when Edwards didn't have to face new challenges. He became a crew boss for TROSA moving,

a job in which he had to learn to manage a staff and handle money. These were new responsibilities for Edwards.

As a crew boss, Edwards had to handle personnel problems, get the moving jobs done on time and handle all the paperwork connected with the moving job. While he had worked restaurant jobs in his life, the management experience was new for Edwards and he developed confidence in his ability to handle a position of responsibility in a crew.

Learning to Be Honest - After becoming a crew boss, a day came when Edwards was paid for a moving job in cash. Prior to that time he had not handled large amounts of cash and it occurred to him that he could just take the money and leave the program.

But by that time, "I was changed," he says. "I knew what would happen to me if I went back." He'd have enough money to get a hotel room and get high, but then what? By that point in the program, Edwards had been working for 18 months on being honest and when an opportunity came to be dishonest, he didn't want to take it. He had increased his capability to do the right thing and the temptation to do otherwise was no longer so great.

Wilbert Edwards' Recommendations for Change

- *Be honest.*
- *Keep in front of you what you felt like on the day you came in. Don't lose sight of that.*
- *Know that you're in the program to change your life and to gain your respect back. You can do that if you stick with it and practice doing the right thing.*
- *Be willing to listen to TROSA staff members; they were addicted, too.*

