

POSITIVE PEER ~ Leticia Chavez-Paulette

Coordinator of Volunteer and Faith-based Services at NM Corrections Department

“Never give up! There is a reason that you had your life experiences and it’s to encourage and empower others. Giving back gives you purpose.”

When you meet the President of the United States and then he uses your testimonial in a future speech you are proof that there is reason you have made it to this point. There is a purpose in your struggles. There were plenty of times when no one thought Leticia would survive her addiction. It had a grip on her so strong; but she never gave up.

Using cocaine in the 90's when everyone was doing it seemed harmless and for a shy and intimidated person, it made Leticia feel like Wonder Woman. It gave her confidence, energy, and nobody could tell her no. She could still work, and it seemed acceptable. She was always striving to better herself and cocaine seemed to help. Until it didn't at all. It got a hold of her, and she fell into the spiral of addiction. She lost everything including her job and her marriage. But the drugs numbed the pain, shame, and guilt she felt from the devastating abortions she endured as a young adult.

In the midst of her addiction, she got pregnant and had a son. The addiction grew in its power, and she started to do things just to get the drugs. They ended up homeless and she was often physically, emotionally, and mentally abused by her drug dealers. A few times she was even left for dead. She started smoking crack and her criminal lifestyle got her 4 felonies in two years. Her son was taken during an arrest. The addiction was just too strong to break at that time.

And then a “God thing” happened as she puts it. A corrections officer had a dream about her. She dreamt Leticia had died so she prayed for her, and the prayer was answered by Leticia getting arrested one last time and she was assigned to this CO's unit. Here she was forced into recovery but it's also where she found her faith.

She went to every AA, NA, and Celebrate Recovery meeting. She went to church every day as well as parenting classes. She did anything she could do while she was inside, and the authentic Wonder Women began to emerge.

After she was released, she started working on developing skills to open a transitional home for women. Women kept coming back to prison because there was nothing for them on the outside. The program gave women what they needed when they got out including clothing, help with IDs, financial literacy and educational programs, and...a home.

She then became a CPSW. “I didn't know my life experience could benefit others. I was actually acknowledged as being valuable”. And then life really did

come full circle as she went from an inmate who used the services to a volunteer who provided services and now in her current position, she supervises services. Leticia was responsible for initiating the first CPSW Training for inmates at the Central NM Correctional Facility and now she is working to bring the training next to the Women's facility in Springer, NM.

Thank you for doing this pioneering work, Leticia. We are grateful for your vision and all you do to make things happen.

PS: Leticia has a great relationship with her son now!