

PROGRAM: Achievement through Counseling and Treatment (ACT)

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Maria Delgado and Sam Cole pose with a picture of Daniel Gonzalez. They are two of the key staff members for JEVS' new job training program for recovering addicts. Photo: Nigel Thompson/AL DÍA News.

A job-training program that brings hope to recovering addicts

JEVS ACT II has a new program offering employment services during the drug rehabilitation process.

By [Nigel Thompson](#)
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When Daniel Gonzalez walked into JEVS ACT II for his first day at the treatment clinic, there were a million thoughts running through his head.

“Am I going to do this? Am I going to stay here? Is this going to be my last time?”

Those were questions Gonzalez had asked of himself for most of his life. In one way or another, he had been getting high since the age of 12, at some point graduating from pot to heroin.

As a result, Gonzalez found himself in a cycle of rehab and relapse, entering many facilities and institutions throughout adulthood, including a stint in prison.

Eventually, all the clinics started feeling the same. He had heard of JEVS ACT II before, but this attitude kept him away for many years.

But when he finally did enter the clinic at 4th and Berks, something changed in his personal life. Gonzalez met his current wife and son. They would prove to be the key drivers of his recovery.

“They changed my life for real,” he said.

Building on new found motivation, Gonzalez got involved in JEVS ACT II’s new vocational training program for recovering addicts.

The first-of-its-kind program was brainstormed three years ago as JEVS tried to find responses to the opioid crisis sweeping the nation. It wrote a grant for the funding of a vocational training program for ACT II’s methadone clients.

“Let’s see what can happen,” said Maria Delgado, the Employment Manager at JEVS ACT.

Learning the culture

At the time, Delgado had more than 10 years of experience getting ex-cons work upon their release from prison, but when she transferred to the new program for recovering addicts in Feb. 2019, it was a whole new world.

“I had to learn the culture,” said Delgado.

In addition to relaxing her own professional wardrobe to better relate to clients, Delgado also had to revert from setting a quota for the amount of people she would place in jobs.

Unlike other job training programs, which make attendance mandatory, JEVS ACT II’s new initiative for recovering addicts is a voluntary program for those receiving methadone treatment at the clinic.

Many of these individuals are at different stages of their recovery from drug addiction, and the approach shows an understanding of each person’s journey back.

“Come when you’re ready,” said Delgado.

A catered approach

When the client does come to get vocational services, they go through an initial interview that gauges their skills and job interests. After the first visit, the client will leave with a new resume put together by the staff, which will also be sent out to potential employers.

Getting the initial resume is often a shock to those who go through the first visit.

“They don’t realize their capabilities. They don’t realize what they can do,” said Delgado.

At the second visit — usually in the same week as the first one — the client learns where their resume was sent. Within two weeks, the client will also receive a career wardrobe referral to be fitted for professional attire.

Since the project’s inception, Delgado says she’s seen over 100 individuals for the initial one-on-one interview. Of that, there are 25 to 30 people across its two sites — at 4th and

Berks and Jefferson Hospital — currently being served, and eight who have gained employment.

The program also offers incentives for those who do get employed. For getting a job, the initial reward is a \$120 gift card. If the client stays employed for a month, they get \$50; two months, \$75; and \$100 for a third consecutive month of employment.

Gonzalez is one of the eight participants to get a job.

After entering the program, he got an interview for a job at the Four Seasons Hotel in Center City. With the help of Delgado and certified employment specialist, Sam Cole — who both attended the interview with him — Gonzalez got the job and works there to this day.

He attributes his success to the presence of Delgado and Cole during the interview. In addition to driving him there, both answered any questions Gonzalez may have had and calmed his nerves.

“If it wasn’t for them, I don’t think I would’ve went through with it,” he said.

However, Gonzalez still says that ultimately, success in the program relies on the client.

“It depends on you,” he affirmed.

Gonzalez is echoed by Cole.

“You need to make a decision for yourself. No one can make it for you,” he said.

Gonzalez admits that he wasn’t ready before. He takes responsibility for the drugs he became addicted to and the effect they had on his family. But with a new life, he hopes to continue working at the Four Seasons as he winds down his methadone treatment.

Daniel Gonzalez’s story is not over, but his recovery from seemingly lifelong addiction through employment services is still a new approach in the world of drug rehabilitation, despite studies showing the benefit of pairing the two.

Changing the stigma

Delgado says she’s received pushback from some employers about hiring clients from a methadone clinic. They feed into the larger negative stigma that surrounds drug addiction today — one that’s been amplified by the opioid crisis.

For her, it’s no different than when she started her career and ex-con re-entry was “the new sexy” as she put it. The same gap in experience for ex-cons while they were in prison exists today for addicts while they’re using.

“The opioid epidemic is ‘the new sexy,’” said Delgado.

With the remainder of its grant money, JEVS ACT II will continue providing voluntary job training to its methadone clients. In the future, the program looks to partner more with the surrounding community and its stakeholders to further its message of hope and battle to reverse the attitude around drug addiction.

“Folks, we’re trying to break the stigma,” said Delgado. “You just have to give them an opportunity.”