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## There's hope in the Healing

He was one of the first ones, and one of the winners. We'll call him Larry. Now sober and clean for a decade, he was in the bad old days "hustling for a drug dealer," he says, using and abusing, doing what he thought he had to do to survive. One of the low points, although he sees the irony in it now, was when he was driving a stolen car and the car got stolen by someone else.

He knew he needed help. He went to one place, but it seemed like a warehouse. Too many people. "I started talking to people," he said, "and someone said there's this new place, the Healing Place. I'd hit bottom, and I knew I was ready to do something." It wasn't easy. It was up and down. Like many who fight drugs and drink, he thought he was ready but fell back, but he was, he acknowledges now, one of the strong and lucky ones. He came back to the Healing Place of Wake County, then a new recovery center for men, and he "graduated" months later, and has been a "silver chipper" (success story) ever since.

The particulars: the Healing Place is one of the most spectacular success stories in public or private treatment programs for substance abusers there is or has ever been. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the men's facility, and the 5th anniversary of the women's unit. Nearly 70 percent of those who go through the program are sober (off drink or drugs) a year later.

The idea came years ago from a nurse who saw a similar program in Louisville. It got legs with the help of activists in this community, among them Fred Barber of Capitol Broadcasting, Barbara Goodmon of the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, Capitol Broadcasting owner Jim Goodmon (Barbara Goodmon's husband) and many others. Dennis Parnell, formerly substance abuse specialist at WakeMed, is president.

The Healing Place opened in 2001 after a yeoman's effort of a fund-raising drive, and became known to those who came to its doorstep as a new kind of recovery center. Many residents have been other places, have completed, even, 30-day withdrawal programs. Some of those programs work well, of course, and all are well-intentioned. But the Healing Place often has men and women enrolled, so to speak, for 12 to 18 months. Some hear about it on the street or in other shelters, some come for a bed and a meal. Some leave. Many stay, and it's not easy. A resident moves through different stages, starting with detox, moving to other levels with expanded privileges ("Off the Street I, Off the Street II, Phase I, Phase II").

There are slips. The Healing Place holds no grudges, and people can leave and come back, or move back in their progress and start a phase over again.

Larry, working steady with a family and a home, is a fellow the Healing Place can point to as exactly what is supposed to happen when a man is really committed to getting help. "Here," he said, "they teach you that you don't need to use. I keep that in my heart. Some days getting high was good, some were bad. But the bad outweighed the good. That's what keeps me grounded."

The Healing Place has people on staff who have successfully completed the program. Enough time has passed that the "formula," if it can be called that, is well-proven, and so is the value of these men's and women's facilities to the Wake County community.

One former resident who has worked there is Sherry (not her real name) who arrived at the women's facility right out of prison. She had beaten a man. She was using at a halfway house. It was a desperate situation.

Finally, she says, someone said, "Why don't you try the Healing Place?" A call was made, and it turns out that someone who was supposed to check in was not coming, so a place opened up. "So," Sherry says, her voice soft but firm, "I know that was God."

She stayed to some degree because "I didn't have anywhere to go and I didn't know anybody."

Her transformation has been complete. She's working for the Healing Place and has a new apartment. She's confident.

Like Larry, she acknowledges the lengthy program was tough. But she's happy.

"The Healing Place taught me there is a greater power," she said. "It taught me how to care about me and about other people. I thought hurting people was normal. My whole family was alcoholics. Then I had a husband and two children. They'd ask me why I did things, and I couldn't answer. Now, I have no desire to use or to hurt other people. I know God's looking."

And sometimes, He's got help.

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