

United States of America
White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative
Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

MS. WILLIAMS: Good morning. My name is Tori Williams and I am not the Tori I was two years ago. Before I came to Solid Rock Ministries and Access to Recovery program I had given up my will to live. I was addicted to crack cocaine and I was a prostitute. I had tried many other things before and nothing ever worked for me, but this program fed me in every way, spiritually, mentally, and physically. (Applause.) It was through this program that I saw the value of my life again and my life was renewed. Access to Recovery taught me to love and to be loved. I am now a loving grandmother and mother. I also learned to live life on life's terms. I have now completed two years of recovery and restored my contact -- (Applause.) -- with my family and with God. I currently serve as a housemother for Solid Rock Ministries and feel called to offer hope to hurting women. There are so many others who need this program like this to restore their lives. It is my pleasure to introduce to you Honorable John Walters, Director of the White House Office of National Drug Policy. Thank you. (Applause.)

DIRECTOR WALTERS: Thank you, Tori. The remarks she just gave are an example, I think, sometimes in a jaded world of miracles that happen in our communities and her journey, I know some people, many people in this room, is one from enormous pain and alienation, giving up and in some cases on life or on hope for the future to a genuine miracle of not only being invested in the future, but of giving futures to others in our community, the example of grace, the example of life moving forward, out of the hands of those who have seen the most broken aspects of life.

Congratulations to Tori and to the many of you here who work with those suffering. (Applause.) I also want to congratulate Jay Hein, the Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives for his outstanding work and the work represented at this conference. The program that we have been most involved which of course touched the organization that Tori got help from, the Access to Recovery Program. This program, as you no doubt know, exemplifies the President's commitment, I think, to faith-based initiatives, and the power of organizations of faith to help us attack effectively social ills.

The President launched ATR with the 2003 State of the Union Address. He called for expanded choice in both treatment and in those that seek support after treatment to getting their lives back on track. To date, the government has invested close to \$400 million and served over 200,000 people since the program was up and running. It's an average cost, I had to do this in advance, I confess, of \$2000 per person served, a remarkably small sum for the number of people that have been helped. ATR expanded the range of treatment and recovery support services by attracting a whole new cohort of faith-based and

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community groups, some of them represented by you sitting in this room. Faith-Based and community organizations now account for 23 percent of the recovery support services and 31 percent of the clinical treatment providers supported by the program.

By introducing a voucher system, the Access to Recovery Program empowered treatment seeking individuals to be free and to make independent choices that met their needs. It allowed them to use the power of faith, which so many have found as a pathway to recovery and sobriety, without the bigotry of the previous support from the government. It proved not only that we could allow faith to be what it has been for so many, but that we could make it more powerful to save more lives. From its inception, the Access to Recovery Program recognized that treatment alone would not suffice, that the view that to many in simplified terms had a period of intense treatment being enough was proven by the experience and reality by even the research that we had to be too limited, that we needed to have extended abilities beyond the immediate term of treatment to help people get and stay sober.

We needed to address multiple needs, housing, job training, spiritual support, education, relapse prevention, child care, transportation. As of March 2008, 65 percent of the people in the program have received recovery support services, that not only get them sober, but to allow them to regularize the sober life and reconnect their lives to their family and to their community. Yale University pointed out looking at the program that access to recovery funds are seeing development of an increasing array of recovery support, not only within the program but outside and an increasing sense of legitimacy and the necessity of that support. That's what the President had in mind.

The ATR program also allowed states to address specific populations that were not receiving the care and treatment that they needed. In Tennessee, for example, ATR funds were used to expand treatment for methamphetamine addiction. In other states, the treatment of juveniles or the treatment of women with dependent children was a focus of the additional funds provided by the program. Abstinence rates went from an average of 64 percent in June 2006 to 74.3 percent in March 2008 for those in the ATR program. Besides high abstinence rates, 24 percent of ATR clients also reported being stably housed, 32 percent employed, 61 percent socially connected to others now, as they weren't when they came in, and 87.8 percent reported no involvement of the criminal justice system at discharge. Remarkable success, since many of these programs have taken clients who have been through other treatment programs and episodes and have not been successful.

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To sustain such efforts, the administration has increased, has just released \$96 million in 2007, seven grant funds, to 24 grantees and approximately \$25 million of the new grants are targeted on methamphetamine, which has been such a horrible additional threat in many parts of the country, especially places that have been underserved by treatment providers and support services. Currently, ATR is funding programs in 18 states, five tribes or tribal organizations, and the District of Columbia. States have also taken initiatives to sustain these changes and these programs with their own funds. Idaho is allocating \$6.5 million, Connecticut, \$1.75 billion, and Louisiana, \$9 million in state general funds and \$3 million in state block grant funds to continue these programs and the support they provide.

You are participating in a quiet revolution that is saving lives. You are participating in a quiet revolution that as the Attorney General just said is removing the bigotry against faith and allowing the reality of the contribution that faith can make appropriately in our government to become a more salient factor, and as it does, it is changing for the better, the future of our communities.

What we have seen with this, I think can be described simply, and I'll close with this, when the President called, you came forward and your faith and your work has saved thousands and thousands of lives. Tori is one example. And you know those lives change the future not only of all the lives that they touch, the children, the family, that have been broken by substance abuse and can be healed. They not only save the lives of the community members who have suffered from the destruction of their fellow human beings and the turning of that self destruction even on others around them, but in turning those lives back to become productive members of our community, as with Tori, most of the people I meet in recovery understand their recovery to tied aggressively to help other people get and stay sober, helping other people heal their lives.

You have taken not only the 200,000 who have been treated, but untold numbers already, and made them a part of our community and a part of our future that they would not have been without this. On behalf of the many, many people, children, parents, family members, and community members who will never get a chance to say thank you, on behalf of my colleagues and the President, it has been an honor to work with you. I want to say thank you and God Bless you. (Applause.)