

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Department of Labor  
Homelessness*

*U.S. Department of Education  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Justice  
U.S. Interagency Council on*

## **Improving Access to Mainstream Services for Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness**

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Hilton Anaheim  
Anaheim, CA  
November 1-3, 2005

### **William Joiner's Story**

My first recollection is of living on San Pedro and 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets in East Los Angeles when I was around 5 years old. As I understand it my mother left my father in the middle of the day when he was at work and packed us up; that occurred when I was four years old but I don't remember it. I had an older brother (4 ½ years older) and a half brother on my mother's side. When I was around 9 years old my half brother was killed at the age of eighteen, shortly after that my mother had what was termed at the time a "nervous breakdown" and committed herself to Camarillo State Mental Hospital. After getting out of the hospital she continued to have consistent delusions and hallucinations.

During this time my brother and I moved in with my father whom I barely knew and really did not remember. I found that I always felt like a stranger in my father's home and eventually ended up running away and going to my first foster home when I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. After returning to my father's home I ran away again and moved in with my mother. Unfortunately, due to her continued mental deterioration I was removed from her home and placed in foster care, then a boys' home and finally a group home. It was at the boys' home that I was introduced to alcohol and marijuana and found that they seemed to make me the person I always wanted to be and made me feel like I was somebody. When I was 19 I was terminated from Department of Children and Family Services care and there was no aftercare at the time, so I ended up being homeless.

Over the next 20 years I drifted from job to job, tried moving to Las Vegas, Reno, San Diego, and San Francisco in an effort to fix my life and all along I had my friend alcohol to see me through. In the late 70s I began shooting drugs and in the late 80s I started smoking crack. Through it all my old friend alcohol was always around. When I failed to keep jobs, when I failed to continue in community, when I failed to maintain a permanent home alcohol was always there.

In early July of 1995 I was walking down the street near Mac Arthur Park going through a plan of how I would be able to use and drink successfully when it occurred to me that I had this plan before and it did not work. I went into medical detoxification, went to an outpatient program for a year and went to Los Angeles City College to study substance abuse counseling but I was doing so well that I decided to take the courses necessary to transfer to California State University Los Angeles. I graduated Magna Cum Laude from

Los Angeles City College with an Associate of Arts degree in Human Services. Again graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology in 2001 and earned my Master of Science degree in Psychology, Marriage and Family Therapy Option in 2003.

I am currently a Marriage and Family Therapist Intern working as a mental health clinician at a residential treatment facility for teen mothers and at-risk girls in Los Angeles. Many of these girls have been homeless, their families have been homeless and most have a fear of becoming homeless after they leave the facility. As clinician I provide individual therapy as well as facilitating a substance abuse prevention and early intervention program which I developed. The program consists of separate weekly evidenced-based group interventions for the teen mothers and at-risk girls and 12-step orientation including an in-house 12-step panel meeting and outside 12-step meetings.