

Grant Program: Second Chance Act

Grant Type: Adult Mentoring

State: New Mexico

Grantee: PB&J Family Services

Frankie started using meth heavily in his mid-30s—and his mother’s death in 1999 drove him to a full-blown addiction. In 2004, at the age of 38, he was convicted for possession and sentenced to drug court—but relapsed and failed the program. Frankie continued using. Because of his addiction, he couldn’t hold a job. Family members took custody of his young son. In 2006, at age 40, he was arrested again—this time for using a gun to recover his property that an addict “friend” had stolen from him. Charged with aggravated assault and battery and armed robbery, Frankie served three years of a nine-year sentence, and was released in 2009 with five years of supervision.

Frankie was motivated to get clean by the possibility of losing his son. About 18 months before his release, he signed up for mentoring through PB&J Family Services, which would also include drug rehabilitation and life skills and parenting classes. PB&J played an instrumental role in helping Frankie become a better father. The group brought Frankie’s son—seven at the time of his dad’s incarceration—to the prison for regular visits and supported them during and after visits.

His PB&J mentors and caseworkers have helped Frankie focus on his sobriety—and he’s now been clean for four-and-a-half years. He attends Narcotics Anonymous meetings between two and five times a week. His sponsor urged him to find ways to give back, so he’s been volunteering at a local rehab center once or twice a month. “I talk to other addicts and let them know there’s a way out,” Frankie said.

PB&J has also helped him insulate himself from the negative influences in his life. At the urging of his case manager, he’s changed his friends. His case manager helped him think about who provided a positive influence and who supported him and his family during his incarceration. “I could count those people on one hand, and that’s who I’ve stuck with. All my new friends are people who are clean. I’ve cut myself from everyone else. PB&J, my family members who have allowed me back in their lives, and NA members are the only ones I hang out with,” Frankie said.

His PB&J mentors have also had a major impact in helping Frankie find work. They helped him identify potential jobs, prepare his applications, and practice through mock interviews. They signed him up and paid for a taxi service that provided him transportation to job interviews and jobs (since he didn’t have a car at the time). In his first post-release job, Frankie was fired when his employers found out about his conviction, but his mentor helped him keep a positive attitude. “He stuck by my side to make sure I made it,” Frankie said. Frankie ultimately landed a manufacturing job, where he’s worked for three years and risen to a mid-level position. “PB&J has helped me turn my obstacles into opportunities and conquer that ‘less-than feeling’ an ex-offender has when released,” Frankie said.

Frankie’s topmost priority is to be a good father. He works the night shift so he can see his son as much as possible. “I’ve missed so much of his life already,” Frankie said, “that I wasn’t going to miss one minute more.” He attends all of his son’s parent-teacher conferences and football games. “There are some nights when I went to work dead-tired, with 45 minutes of sleep, so that I could see every minute of his game. My dream is to continue getting my life in order... so that I can take him to a Broncos game in Denver. I’m not there yet, but some day soon.”

In addition to providing parenting classes, PB&J has helped Frankie as a father. “They prepared me to face up to everything I’ve done. When I was in prison, my son called and said he wanted to talk to me about my drug use. It freaked me out. I talked to PB&J during class, and they helped me prepare to answer in person, so that I could talk to my son honestly about what happened.”

All names and other identifying details have been concealed to preserve individuals’ privacy.