



ATTC

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



In My Own Words. . .

*A compilation of essays by individuals supported by
Medication-Assisted Treatment in long-term recovery . . .*

In partnership with Faces & Voices of Recovery and the National Alliance for Medication Assisted Recovery

Published in 2012 by the
Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) National Office
University of Missouri — Kansas City
ATTC National Office
5100 Rockhill Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64110

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At the time of publication, Pamela Hyde, J.D., served as the SAMHSA Administrator. H. Westley Clark, MD, JD, MPH, served as CSAT Director, Anne M. Herron, MA, served as Director of CSAT's Division of Services Improvement, and Donna Doolin, LSCSW, served as the CSAT Project Officer.

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*raising
awareness
building
skills
changing
practice*



ATTC

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Since 1993, the ATTC Network has translated the latest research in addictions treatment and recovery services and disseminated these findings to the behavioral healthcare field using a comprehensive array of strategies. The ATTC Network works to develop and strengthen the workforce providing vital addictions treatment and recovery services to those entering the treatment system. In 2010, 23.1 million persons aged 12 or older needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem (NSDUH, 2010).

In partnership with Single State Authorities, treatment provider associations, addictions counselors, multidisciplinary professionals, faith and recovery community leaders, family members of those in recovery, and other stakeholders, the ATTC Network assesses the training and development needs of the substance use disorders workforce. To meet the identified needs, the Network develops and conducts training and other technology transfer activities, especially targeting the frontline counselor. Particular emphasis is on raising awareness of and improving skills in using evidence-based treatment and recovery practices for the purpose of changing practice.

The Network is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) and consists of fourteen Regional Centers and a National Office serving all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Islands. Together we take a unified approach in delivering cutting-edge products, services and resources to support a powerful workforce...a workforce which has the potential to transform lives.

Congratulations to the 2011 award recipients of the “In My Own Words...” Essay Contest.

I would also like to acknowledge the many contest applicants from whom the top 20 group was selected. As someone whose recovery is assisted by methadone and has spent most of the last two decades fighting for the acceptance of medications as pathways to recovery, reading these essays was almost overwhelming. Words like unique and courageous seem inadequate. Yes, this year’s essay contest was unique in that the essay writers are all people whose long-term recovery was assisted by medications. However, it is the first time, in my recollection, we have been asked to address not just our recovery, but also our medication-assisted recovery.

Courageous? Writing about your recovery when the stigma surrounding medications is still horrendous, knowing it is horrendous, and telling your story anyway demonstrates true courage!

The last decade has seen many changes in the world of medication-assisted recovery. In 2001, the Recovery Summit in St. Paul, Minnesota embraced multiple pathways to recovery and led to the founding of Faces & Voices of Recovery whose first chairperson, the late Lisa Mojer-Torres, JD, was a methadone patient and advocate. The passage of the Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000 (DATA 2000) also opened doors by authorizing the treatment of opiate dependence in a private medical office with buprenorphine. In recent years, Acamprosate and Naltrexone have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as effective medications for alcohol. Then there is my personal favorite, funding was issued for the Medication Assisted Recovery Support (MARS) Project by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) Recovery Community Services Programs (RCSP) in 2006 and again in 2010, where I work as the Director.

What hasn’t changed is what appears in all of the essays -- gratitude for a chance to live the life in recovery and dedication to continued recovery. We are humbled by and thankful for each and every essay submitted. In the end, due to providence rather than planning, the three prize winners represented the broadest possible cross section of medication-assisted recovery medications. Methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone (vivotrol).

This booklet is a “Must Read” for everyone, including professionals and policy makers but especially for those family members who haven’t come to terms with the difference between a drug and a medication.

The National Alliance for Medication Assisted (NAMA) Recovery was proud to partner with Faces & Voices of Recovery (FAVOR), and the Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) National Office in making the words of our brothers and sisters in recovery available to the public.



Walter Ginter, CMA
MARS Project Director
National Alliance for Medication Assisted Recovery



A

Acceptance

In My Own Words

“Out of difficulties grow miracles.”

Jean De La Bruyere

As a result of pioneering research, scientists have learned addiction is a chronic, relapsing disease comparable to other conditions, such as type II diabetes and heart disease. It affects both the brain and behavior, and if left untreated, has very serious consequences. There are many paths to recovery from addiction. However, for many people, treatment is necessary and may also include medication. Science has taught us that when medication-assisted treatment is combined with other supportive services, patients are often able to stop abusing alcohol or drugs and return to productive lives.

In recognition of the 2011 National Recovery Month, the Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) National Office, in partnership with Faces & Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) and the National Alliance for Medication Assisted (NAMA) Recovery, orchestrated the 4th annual “In My Own Words ...” Essay Contest to invite individuals who have been supported by Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), such as utilization of methadone or buprenorphine for opioid addiction and acamprosate or naltrexone for alcohol addiction, to share their own story of recovery. They were asked to describe, in their own words, the most challenging part about MAT and explain why they are committed to recovery.

“I see it as medication. If I had diabetes, I would need insulin to regulate my sugar. So now, I need methadone to regulate not using heroin,” said one MAT patient. Taking medication, such as methadone, is not the same as substituting one addiction for another, and when used properly, it does NOT create a new addiction. Rather, it helps manage and maintain recovery.

A record-breaking number of 128 essays from across the country, as well as the United Kingdom, were received and reviewed by the ATTC National Office and an Essay Review Panel. Within this Essay Booklet you will find the first, second and third prize-winning essays chosen by an Expert Review Panel, as well as 17 additional essays receiving honorable mention. All participants received a special certificate and appreciation gift for their willingness to share these very moving stories. It was a difficult task selecting the contest winners from such a rich pool of entries. We are grateful to all who shared their very personal experiences with us. In turn, we hope these essays will offer hope and inspiration to those who are still struggling, as well as acknowledgment of the tremendous accomplishments made by these particular individuals.

Max F.

Philadelphia, PA

MAT has supported my recovery from addiction in a phenomenal way. It has given me the opportunity to see things in a new positive light and helps me remember that every day is a precious gift. MAT, specifically methadone treatment, helps me cope with the struggles of life in a way that I was incapable of doing in the past. **MAT did the one thing other methods of treatment couldn't do for me, which was to buy me enough time to make decisions about my life with a clear mind and a new foundation.** Now that MAT is a part of my life, positive things have engulfed my existence and have seriously changed everything about the wonderful journey of my life for the better. MAT helped me gain a clear enough mind in order to pick my vocation, which is to battle addiction.

I continue to be committed to recovery, because I volunteer, work, and go to college in order to further my experience and education about my disease. I have made the decision to dedicate the rest of my life to helping those afflicted with the terrible disease of addiction, so that I may give back to the very cause that saved my life. I continue to be committed to recovery by obtaining great grades in school and doing my best at volunteering and working with fellow addicts. Recovery has become my passion, and I will always be fiercely determined to combat addiction by any means necessary.

*new
foundation*

Adam D.

Bridgton, ME

How MAT has supported my recovery from addiction is that methadone maintenance treatment has allowed me to give myself a second chance at happiness and has taught me to value long-term sustainable contentment above short-term, shallow, drug-induced pleasure. The ancient symbol known as “yin-yang” is meant to illustrate that our reality operates in a constant struggle to maintain balance. When our physiological balance is thrown off by using drugs to induce happiness, our internal equilibrium must regain our body’s balance by following that pleasure with extreme feelings of despair. Eventually I came to realize that the highs were nowhere near good enough to justify all the abysmal lows. My mornings used to begin with a race between my eyes opening and my depression and withdrawals starting. Back then I felt like I was a little more than a “typical drug addict.” My story had a first drug, a favorite drug, and a rock bottom, but somewhere between the lines was someone who wanted help for so many reasons. I continue to be committed to my recovery, because I love my family, my country, and the compassionate clinic staff. **The moral of my story is that with MAT and counseling, I have been able to stay alive, keep my job, receive my B.A. degree in Philosophy, and pursue happiness.** If I had stayed on drugs, my story was destined to be a tragedy about the catastrophe of a person’s life falling far short of his/her potential.

> *First Place Recipient*

Darlene D.

Philadelphia, PA

1st Place Recipient

Medicated Assisted Treatment (MAT) has supported my recovery from addiction in ways I never expected. Early in recovery my only concern was not feeling sick and having a place to sleep other than the ground or a park bench. When I became pregnant, I was terrified that I would not be able to take care of my child. MAT allowed me to become well, function normally, and raise a beautiful, healthy daughter.

I am commonly asked why I have been on methadone maintenance for 14 years, and my reply is, “because it works for me.” Sadly, MAT is misunderstood and stigmatized in our communities. What most people do not realize is that my medication is only a fraction of what my recovery is about. As with anyone in recovery, I needed therapy, family support, positive people, and finding my passion in life. MAT is just that, assisted treatment. It’s a medication I take to treat my disease of addiction. Using drugs was only a symptom of other things I needed to learn how to cope with to be successful.

I continue to be committed to recovery, because when I allowed myself to be open to the process and accept my disease, I was free. Free to be a loving mother of two; free to contribute to my community; free to share my recovery experiences; and free to be a woman I am proud of, honored to be, and will continue to become.

Xavier V.

Bakersville, NC

My battle with addiction has always been a matter of me falling down, and then picking myself up again. I tried to quit on my own several times, but it always seems that I would lose my resolve rather quickly. When my wife found out she was pregnant, I made the decision to seek help, because I had failed so many times on my own. This time I was determined not to fail. Medication-Assisted Treatment was the best option for me. The methadone helps me not to be sick, and significantly reduces my desire to use opiates. I am working and at home with my family where I should be instead of out roaming the streets. My counselor understands addiction and just having someone lend a sympathetic ear takes a load off my shoulders. My counselor has educated me on addiction and helped me to find triggers and identify situations that led me to use. Medication, along with help from my counselor, has helped me to break those cycles and become closer to my family.

I continue to be committed to recovery, because my family is the most important thing in my life. I want to close this chapter of my life and start a new one supporting my wife and helping my son grow into adulthood. Medication-Assisted Recovery has allowed me to go to college and work towards a degree to better support my family. This is something I never thought was possible before.

Sonia D.

Millers Creek, NC

Methadone has changed my life completely. I have my life back now. **I have happiness that I haven't had in years.** I can finally be a better mother, and that's my second goal, being the best that I can be. I know in my heart that if I hadn't found methadone that I would be dead now. This miracle drug has saved my life. In 2005 I lost my mom, and that was when things got really bad. Since then, I have been raped, beaten, and abused, and that is what drugs have done for me. Nothing good ever came from my drug use.

I continue to be committed to my recovery, because with methadone I can think right and live right. Also, with the help of my therapist, Kelli, I can work through my problems without drugs. I thank God for letting me find this miracle drug methadone before it was too late. I can finally be there for my five children. I could never repay the McLeod Center for helping me regain my life. Thank you so much for everything!

James R.

Tyngsboro, MA

My name is Jim. I am 43 years old. My drug abuse spanned almost three decades. Without the support of MAT, I would not be here to tell my story. Growing up my mother always told me about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. We were very close, but her words of wisdom never really sunk in. I found myself hanging with people my mom warned me against. It wasn't long before I experimented with drugs. Before I knew it, I was in full blown addiction. Over the years I tried to hide this fact. I found myself slipping deeper into a destructive way of life. I knew in my heart this was not for me, yet I was doing exactly what my mom told me not to do. I was ashamed but felt I was in too deep. The drugs, lies, and secrets were destroying me. I was so messed up I didn't even see how it was destroying my family. Until I became sober with the help of methadone and counseling, I didn't realize my secret had been out for a long time. Mom would just not give up on me. I felt alone. I was living a nightmare. Finally I accepted help from my sister. I confided in her only, knowing how this would hurt my mom. I decided I had to let my mom down for the last time. My sister was an angel sent to help me. She found the right doctors and the best meetings. It eventually became clear that I needed MAT. After much pain and heartache, I found a program that was right for me, methadone treatment and group meetings. **I no longer felt alone.**

My mom passed away recently. I am so thankful that she was able to see me clean and sober during the last years of her life. We became very close, and I was able to help her during her illness, as she had helped me. The last thing she said to me before she died was, "Jim, I am so proud of you. Do not let anyone disrespect you, not even yourself." This is why I continue to be committed to recovery.

*never
give up*

Brandi C.

Greeneville, TN

I continue to be committed to my recovery, because as an addict, my life was in a downward spiral. Addiction in my life was the norm. I have been surrounded by addicts my entire life. As a child I watched my mother and grandmother depend on opiates to function. At the age of 23 I watched as my 21 year old brother overdosed and died on a mixture of morphine and xanax. At this time, I was suffering from my own addiction. At this point in my life I was struggling to be a mother, and I knew that I had to get control of this disease that was sure to kill me, as well. With research and the help of friends, I discovered methadone. I located the McLeod Center and soon began my treatment. For \$10 a day I get treatment from a physician, therapist, and my medication. This has been a lifesaving treatment for me. In my community, treatment for addiction is few and far between with a low success rate. Also, the stigma of treatment sometimes prevents addicts from asking for help. At McLeod this is non-existent. **After receiving the treatment I am a class "A" mom who is totally involved in my children's live and has become a productive member of society.** Without the help of McLeod, my life would not be the same, if I would have even had a life at all. I only wish my brother had been give the same option.

*life-saving
treatment*

Angela K.

Franklin, NH

MAT has supported my recovery from addiction by first blocking the effects of withdrawal from opiates. The withdrawal symptoms for me were one of the strongest things pulling me back into use. When you feel like you're dying, and the one thing that can make you feel like you are not dying anymore is within your grasp, most people that I have witnessed and known are not strong enough not to take whatever will make them feel better.

The second thing MAT did for me was give me a chance to learn different ways of dealing with the thought processes of addiction by offering many groups and classes having to do with all aspects of addition and how it affects our lives, our families, and our communities.

In short, by taking methadone, which stops withdrawal symptoms and also the euphoric effects of any other opiate should one slip on his/her way to recovery, I have my mind and my body back. **I have my LIFE back, and for that, I will be eternally grateful.**

I continue to be committed to recovery, because I deserve it, and most of all, my children, my family, and my community deserves it. That is why I am now in my second year of college to become an addiction counselor myself, so that I can give back a little bit of the hope I now feel everyday to someone else.

Nichole H.

Seaside, CA

Recovery has been the best to have ever happened to me. Not only has it given me the opportunity to make huge positive life changes, but it has given me the second chance to be a positive role model and loving mother and wife to my family. Before I started methadone maintenance, I tried several times unsuccessfully to stop using illicit drugs. I was a selfish person who cared only about me and my next high. I am a mother of three wonderful children, and while I was using drugs, I was not a good role model or mother to them. Since being on methadone maintenance and attending counseling sessions each month, I have faced my demons and made tons of positive changes in my life. I now face problems head on with all my emotions, instead of drowning them with drugs. I have become a better parent to my children and now take the time to enjoy the little things they do and the milestones they cross each day. What once was a goal of “How will I get high today?” has now turned into a goal of “What will I do next in life?” **I wake up each morning and look forward to each day and what it will bring.** Methadone has been a medication that has not only saved my life, but also given me back so many things. I love life now, and I owe it all to MY sobriety.

Lee Ann K.

Philadelphia, PA

The first day of my new life began on January 27, 2006. I was introduced to Medication-Assisted Treatment. I had struggled with heroin addiction for five years. I was stuck in a revolving door of in and out of rehabs and detoxes. I decided to try Medication-Assisted Treatment, because nothing else was working. Methadone and therapy allowed me a responsible and productive relationship with my four children and because of that, they themselves are in a better place. I was there to see my daughter graduate from high school, and when my other daughter gave birth, it was the joy of my life, my first grandson.

This was all possible, because methadone allowed me to find recovery. Today I am employed as a Recovery Specialist at North East Treatment Center, and it’s also where I receive treatment. I continue to be committed to recovery, because it has shown me a new way of life, and recovery allows me to be a productive member of society. People ask me if I’ll ever stop taking methadone. I reply, “Just for today, no.” I don’t know what tomorrow will bring, but as long as my life is free from the bondage heroin had on me, I’ll take the methadone any day. **I have stopped the vicious cycle of addiction that was in my family for generations.** God willing, on January 27, 2012, I will have six years of recovery. I gave Medication-Assisted Treatment a try, and it’s the best decision I have ever made.

*one day
at a time*

> *Second Place Recipient*

Louis B.

Los Angeles, CA

2nd Place Recipient

I've been sober for 11 years and six months. I would never have imagined I could experience even one day from alcohol/drugs back then. For eight-long years I had never been able to get longer than 30 days sober; being in and out of AA, therapy, and having tried to kill myself. Then I met a psychiatrist who saw past that homeless unemployable, degenerate hope-to-die alcoholic – to a person gripped by a terrible disease, with a medical solution.

At that time in 1999, naltrexone was new. I had tried all the other clearly non-effective recovery methods. What harm could a trial be? MAT moved me for the first time to stop dissociating when triggered. I found myself being completely present, able to stop the addictive process. I got 60 days, after which, like an alcoholic/addict, my self-will tested this MAT by drinking/using. The medication worked. I stayed present and have been able to be recovery-committed since, knowing it was possible.

I continued taking naltrexone for two years. I went off when I had built enough behavioral tools and support to ensure my ongoing recovery. I continue to live each day only 24 hours at a time, knowing that I can return to drinking and using tomorrow. If it wasn't for MAT, I would not be here to tell my story. I am grateful that there are medical options to help people struggling when all else has failed them.

Bianca D.

Jacksonville, FL

Today I've taken back my life and have taken control again. With the help of suboxone, I have been able to get clean and stay clean now for almost four months. I no longer wake up in the mornings and start my day by chasing down a pill. I no longer have to isolate myself from my family and friends, because I am embarrassed and ashamed of what I have been doing and who I have become. I no longer have to put off going somewhere or doing something or meeting someone, because I don't have my "medicine."

MAT has supported my recovery from addiction in so many ways. My children are no longer in danger, because Mom is high. I no longer have to spend hours and days in bed, because I am so sick and can't get a refill on my "medicine" or get in touch with someone to give me their "medicine." I no longer call in sick for work or have to go in late, because I am out again chasing a pill and can't function without it.

I continue to be committed to recovery, because I can live my life now. I can spend time with my girls sober and not be sick. I can hold a decent job. I can look my mom and dad in the eyes and see that they are proud. Most importantly, I can get up in the morning and look myself in the eyes and not be ashamed of what I see. Thank you, MAT!

Troy W.

San Francisco, CA

I remember the dark Orwellian picture addicts would paint of MAT before I first walked into treatment. Regardless that most had never entered a program themselves; they'd repeat like a mantra that methadone maintenance was nothing more than state sponsored drug dealing. Well, for two years I did my best to self-fulfill their uniformed claim.

For two years I turned up to substitute an opiate I'd already grown weary of taking. My fear and ignorance was so ingrained that I became nothing more than a passenger, a passive participant in my own treatment. **But little by little with patient counseling I began to accept the help that had always been there.** No divine intervention, no great epiphany, just somewhere along the line this passenger had been taught how to drive his own recovery.

It may have been two years coming, but nothing could match the sweet sickness of that first reduction from 105 to 100 mg: Every terrible tasting cigarette a reminder that I'd begun to take control. Every ache, progress.

I continued to decrease at my own pace since, restoring clarity with each reduction. My 13 year old son's recent cancer diagnosis should've tested by resole, but instead, only strengthened it with a solemn truth: He needs me, but without treatment I wouldn't be in a place where he could find me.

Although I'm not out of the woods yet, I'm happy travelling the road I'm on, and because MAT is more than methadone, I know there will be help along the way.

my own pace

Kimberly T.

Millcreek, WV

It's been a difficult journey from the beginning. A small town girl from the majestic rolling hills of Snowshoe, WV. The outgoing cheerleader voted prettiest smile and honor roll student determined to attend college after graduation. A dream that had been in my sights for far too long. An escape route from the alcoholic father, whom loved to give me a malicious tongue lashing every evening. Fond memories of my face burning, pulsating with fire from the slap I evidently deserved.

After graduation my head was held high and my bags bursting at the seams as I loaded up that faded blue hand-me-down Dodge. I was college bound and a whole new world was at my fingertips, but life as I knew it was about to spin out of orbit. A complete upheaval of my morality and values. All the sacrifices made vanquished at that one single moment of exposure. I had fallen into that great black abyss called addiction.

Somewhere in the darkness I lost a decade because of my addiction to heroin, but with the support of M.A.T., I've been given a second chance. The chance to become a better mother, daughter and person. The miracle to wake up every day and tuck my sons in every night. The opportunity to never take life for granted and continue being committed to my recovery for a better future. A better life for my family and myself. In conclusion, M.A.T. is the best thing that's ever happened to me.

Daniel T.

Reston, VA

Fourteen months ago, I began my journey away from a place of unimaginable ignorance and chaos. Suffering from the cost of my own indulgences, I discovered that at my weakest point, this was when I was to be my strongest. I have now emerged from this place with my mind free and my path clear. The Gorilla that goes by the name of Heroin does not get fed, and this is how I've done it.

First, I maintain a lifestyle that includes people who also suffer from this illness and wish to remain free of opiates. **It is paramount that I have people I can trust, to talk openly and honestly about my struggle.** Before treatment I suffered from a belief that I was able to decipher my own personal issues. It's now clear to me that this thinking was completely misguided.

Second, is suboxone. The most profound conclusion I have come to in dealing with this illness is that time is the most effective tool to arrest my use. The more time I have away from a shot of heroin, the further my mind drifts from its grip. Suboxone eliminates my power cravings and affords me the time I need to keep this savage affliction at bay.

For fourteen years I've tried every method I could engineer to arrest this affliction. This method has worked for me. I now believe my future to be without limit provided I maintain my commitment to recovery.

Jessica P.

Bangor, ME

I had been an opiate addict for over 15 years and lost everything that was important, including custody of my son. It was my father's drug related death, two and a half years ago, when I realized the impact my death could have on my son. This was a pivotal moment when I knew I had to change.

MAT has supported my recovery from addiction by helping me cope with my cravings. D.H.B.R. provided me with a clinician who helped me achieve the more practical aspects of my recovery. **As I became physically stable, I realized that replacement therapy wasn't enough and with the help of my supports, I was connected to a substance abuse counselor.** It is in this relationship that I found a safe place to learn and grow. It was a place where I could explore the underlying causes of my addiction and deal with the guilt brought on by the actions of my addiction. These understandings helped me move forward in my life, so it is with the combination of self work, MAT, and my dedicated support "team," that I have been able to live a happy drug free life. This in time led to my son and I being reunited.

My recovery has not been easy, but anything that is worth having is worth working for. At 33, I will remain committed to my recovery. I love life, and I want to continue living it for me and my son, because recovery is the only place where that's possible.

*move
forward*

Joan S.

Philadelphia, PA

My name is Joanie, and suboxone has saved my life. For more than 26 years I was addicted to heroin. During this time I never thought I could survive a single day without heroin, coke, and pills. Thanks to my medical provider, suboxone, my groups, and psychotherapy, I now have a life that is worth living. Twenty months ago I was at a doctor appointment when I overheard other patients talking about suboxone. I was not aware that suboxone was available at my HIV clinic. When I asked about suboxone, I was referred to the man who became my therapist. Although I had tried to stop using previously, this was the first time I had any success with stopping using heroin. I continued to smoke marijuana for eight months after stopping heroin believing that I could never stop smoking. I eventually even stopped smoking pot a little over a year ago. **I am truly living a life today, a life as it was intended to be lived.** Today I have a relationship with my children and my grandchildren, something I never had before. I have real friends today, not just drug buddies, but real honest-to-goodness friends. I am engaged to be married to the most wonderful man in the world. The most important thing that recovery has given me is that I have “me” back, and I can say that I love me!

life worth living

Daniel T.

Wichita, KS

It was time for me to get sober. I had exhausted all my excuses which justified my drinking. The marriage of twenty three years ended four years ago. Good friends and decent jobs were only memories.

I was drinking only to live day to day and even that wasn't enough to ward off the pain and fears both real and imagined. I had to get help. I contacted a medical provider prior to entering treatment. Fortunately, she had knowledge of alcoholism and the possibilities of relapse. We had conversation about my few short lasting previous attempts at sobriety. Upon hearing my story, she suggested I give acamprosate a try.

Then she shared that it was not only proven to help with cravings I may have, but also would work to ease some of the highs and lows that had previously destroyed my willingness. I was encouraged and began my recovery program combining the 12 steps of AA and new tools I was to learn in treatment, and taking the acamprosate as prescribed. I almost immediately began improving. My spirituality was at a new level as I worked the steps and began to grow. I began to broaden my support network to include a sponsor, peers in recovery, and a trained counselor.

I noticed not feeling the old “blues” near as much in the attempt at recovery using MAT. Honestly, I had been skeptical at first but was grateful to have been open minded enough in this new start to supplement my recovery with acamprosate. The old, irritable, restless and discontent feelings the A.A. Big Book talks about have grateful not resurfaced. I stay in recovery and continue to take acamprosate after months of sobriety, because it has given me what I needed to regain my life. **I am employable again, have a host of true friends, and can actually be counted upon by others.**

As I grow spiritually I'm able to accept my past and begin to plan for a future filled with exciting possibilities free from the loneliness and attendant problems of alcohol addiction.

> *Third Place Recipient*

Ian C.

Minneapolis, MN

Suboxone saved my life. I've been clean and sober since that day five years ago when I walked into my doctor's office beaten down by my addiction and finally asked for help.

At 30 years of age, after 15 years of drug addiction, I started suboxone. I had been attending 12 step groups, but after years of heroin and pill addiction, numerous drug treatments, and chronically relapsing, I had to do something different. The decision was difficult. Suboxone is controversial, and I feared the judgments of others in recovery.

Medication-Assisted Treatment is a BIG part of my recovery, but staying sober depends on more than just medication. I do service work, go to meetings, stay away from drugs/ alcohol, and surround myself with supportive people.

Medication-Assisted Treatment is the best decision I had made in a long time. I know I wouldn't be where I am today without the help from my doctors and the MAT program. Suboxone has stopped my cravings and preoccupation with getting high. My life is no longer controlled by being high, lying, feeling miserable, then starting the cycle again.

I'm 100% committed to my recovery. Even though some days are still hard, I know I can make it though the tough times. I now have a good job, a house, and a family. Besides all that, I now have something I never thought I could, sobriety and true happiness. I owe a lot of that to MAT.

3rd Place Recipient

Collin W.

Santa Cruz, CA

With the help of Medication-Assisted Treatment and the council of a wise and empathetic former addict, I continue to be committed to physical and emotional recovery from years of opiate abuse. In sobriety I have found happiness, pride, and health that I thought I had lost forever.

Before enrolling in MAT, I had no hope of ever escaping addiction. Heroin controlled every aspect of my life, and as a result of my dependence, I was malnourished, unstable, and frequently breaking the law. Those closest to me were selling their bodies, overdosing, and dying. **In a moment of clarity I saw that I had only two options, death or recovery.** I felt raw, vulnerable, and scared of a life without heroin, but I found a treatment program and enrolled immediately.

When I first walked into the Janus Community Clinic on the day of my induction, I was surprised to see an eclectic mix of mothers and fathers, students and teachers, musicians, and artists all living life drug-free with the aid of MAT. I have since become a part of this brave group of recovering addicts and have found that we are all courageous and strong. We all share the courage that it took to initially seek MAT and the strength to keep coming back and stay committed to our recovery.

Today I smiled and laughed. I felt calm, and thankful for life's simple pleasures. MAT is helping me learn how to live my life sober. While there are undoubtedly many obstacles ahead, I am confident in my ability to overcome them.

“Man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for one second without hope.”

Anonymous



Community

Essay Review Panel:

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*Executive Director
Faces & Voices
of Recovery*

Walter Ginter, CMS
*Medication Assisted
Recovery Services
Project Director
National Alliance
of Medication
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The ATTC Network is funded by:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
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samhsa.gov

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