

**Grant Program:** Second Chance Act

**Grant Type:** Adult Mentoring

**State:** California

**Grantee:** Amity Foundation

**Program Name:** Amistad de Los Angeles

Now clean for over two years, Wade abused drugs for almost 40 years. He first tried heroin at age 14—the same year he ran away from home to escape the repeated abuse he suffered at the hands of his mother’s boyfriends. At 16, he was snorting heroin daily; within a year he was shooting it into his veins just as frequently.

His addiction cost him nearly everything. He joined the U.S. Army at age 18, and at 21 was caught using and was discharged with an “Other Than Honorable” designation, which cut off his access to the medical benefits available to most veterans. After leaving the Army, he lived a transient, paycheck-to-paycheck life. Wade moved from Alaska to Texas to Wyoming, losing touch with his family and squandering his earnings on drugs. Though he somehow eluded arrest all those years, his criminal lifestyle caught up to him at age 50, when he was caught breaking into a house to steal things to sell in order to buy drugs.

Near the end of his 16-month prison term, Wade met a mentor associated with the Amity Foundation’s Amistad de Los Angeles, a nonprofit drug rehabilitation center and recipient of a Second Chance Act grant. The mentor, a former drug addict himself, regularly visits L.A. jails to recruit inmates for Amistad’s drug rehab program. After hearing the mentor’s presentation, Wade said to him, “You’ve been to all those places and done all those things, and look at you now. How did you change your life?”

When he was released on parole, Wade opted to check himself into Amistad, a 200-bed inpatient therapeutic community. Wade was released from jail in the middle of the night, and the mentor picked him up and drove him to his new home, where he has now lived for almost a year. In his first six months there, Wade participated in daily group and one-on-one sessions that helped him manage his addiction, explore his past trauma, and improve his ability to live a productive, healthy, crime- and drug-free life. Counselors helped him understand how to live with Hepatitis C, with which he was diagnosed while in jail.

After completing his parole, Wade was free to leave Amistad but he chose to stay, hoping to follow in his mentor’s footsteps and serve as an alcohol and drug counselor. He applied for and received a spot in Amistad’s highly selective apprenticeship program. In the course of the one-year apprenticeship, he has lived in Amistad and is supported by a program scholarship. At first, he shadowed a current counselor and now with only two months remaining before he becomes an official counselor, he is leading group sessions and interviewing potential Amistad residents to see if they’re ready for the program. In recent weeks, he has taken on a new responsibility: he now goes into Los Angeles County jails to identify people who are ready for change and interested in entering Amistad’s drug rehabilitation program—just like his mentor did for him a little over a year ago.

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