

**Grant Program:** Second Chance Act

**Grant Type:** Adult Mentoring

**State:** Minnesota

**Grantee:** [Amicus](#)

The son of a father who had disappeared and a mother who was addicted to cocaine, Eddie had a difficult childhood. His mother's addiction caused her to lose custody of Eddie when he was five years old, sending him into Alabama's foster care system. From age 5 to age 19, Eddie lived in 12 foster homes, never staying in one place for more than two years. Some foster parents were physically abusive; one ran a gun smuggling business. Eddie's own activities got him involved in the juvenile justice system, which made finding foster families more difficult. After spending over a year in a temporary shelter, Eddie was sent to stay in a group home where security measures reminded him of a juvenile detention center.

"I remember sitting back in my room and thinking about my mom and starting to cry," Eddie recalls. "I thought, 'I'm 16 years old. Why am I locked up?'"

Eddie was eventually placed with another foster family, yet his situation soon became unstable again when his foster father accused him of setting the family's equipment shed on fire. Eddie was convicted of arson and sentenced to a disciplinary "boot camp" for 30 days.

At 18 years old, Eddie joined the National Guard, where he gained experience in avionics electronics. After fulfilling his two-year commitment, he enrolled in college, found a steady job, and got into a relationship. But his success was short-lived. He cut class often and had to drop out of college. He then lost his girlfriend, his job, and his apartment within a period of two weeks. Hoping for a fresh start, Eddie followed a friend to Minnesota.

His missteps continued, however. Searching for friendship, money and a place to stay, he found the wrong friends, drank excessively, and became engaged in criminal behavior ranging from burglary to possession of stolen firearms. "I knew that I was keeping was bad company, but I felt like I had no other options," says Eddie. After building a lengthy criminal record and progressively longer jail sentences, he made his final misstep when he fought with his then-girlfriend and was convicted of domestic assault.

While in prison once more, he truly began to realize that he couldn't make a change without first changing himself. "Something happened this time. Something clicked," he says.

Eddie got counseling, began learning to manage his own anger, and started planning for a new life. He contacted Amicus and participated in their program at the Minnesota Correctional Facility at Stillwater. Since his release about a year ago, he has been matched with a volunteer peer supporter through the Amicus One to One program and has sought job-search advice and assistance from the agency's referral services for ex-offenders. Eddie also volunteers to tell his story and builds his writing portfolio through guest posts on the Amicus blog, "Inside Change." Amicus is helping Eddie, but ultimately he has chosen to help himself.

A record with multiple felonies on it is a challenge difficult for anyone to overcome. Still, Eddie has a plan and a dream. He hopes to study screenwriting and cinematography, but first he's working hard to find a job which can help him sustain what he sees as his new independence.

"It starts with you – your emotional independence, your financial independence," Eddie says. "A lot of times you have to reach out for help, but I'm learning that you've got to reach out for the right help."

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