Finding Purpose and Recovery at TROSA

Vocational training emphasizes esteem building, adjustment to social conditions, skills building, and basic education

Across the country, nearly 22 million Americans are out of the workforce or are underemployed. Decades of research has documented the links between unemployment and substance use disorders. Many of the residents at TROSA have lived this cycle, often struggling to obtain full-time employment during their addiction.

In 2011, individuals struggling with substance abuse were almost twice as likely to be unemployed as individuals who were not abusing substances.

Yet, traditionally, substance abuse treatment programs have not been designed to provide vocational rehabilitation, instead focusing only on the individual’s addiction. In North Carolina, for example, only one in every four substance abuse treatment facilities provides employment counseling or training to participants.

Ahmad, Jessie, and Reggie are among the lucky ones—they found a place where they could get help with their addiction while receiving vocational training and counseling—and that place was TROSA.

Research shows that gainful employment is one of the best predictors of successful substance abuse treatment.

The year was 1982. Ahmad, a 13 year old boy, had immigrated to the United States, seeking refuge with his family from the Soviet War in Afghanistan. “This is the country where you’ll live and where you’ll learn the culture,” Ahmad’s father told him. As a boy, Ahmad had big dreams, hoping to one day become a famous actor in Hollywood.

Today, at 44 years old, Ahmad is a successful small business owner. Seeing him in his signature white painter’s pants and company shirt, it is hard to imagine the life he led before he went through TROSA’s multi-year recovery program. By the time Ahmad entered TROSA, he was 33 years old and he had spent the last seven years in and out of prison. His addiction to crack cocaine inhibited him from having a full-time job throughout his adult life.

Ahmad spent the next five years at TROSA—first completing the two year program and then participating in the highly selective Scholars Program and attending UNC-Chapel Hill. As he became more secure in his recovery, Ahmad began serving in leadership roles in our construction vocational training program among his peers. With his background as an artist and his newfound self-esteem, Ahmad’s dreams began to evolve.

In 2008, Ahmad achieved his goal of starting his own small business and opened Graduate Custom Painting, a

(Continued on page 2)
Durham-based painting company that employs ten full-time workers and numerous others part-time. Ahmad attributes much of his success to TROSA and the strong work ethic and skills he developed under Alan Seawell, a TROSA graduate and manager of TROSA’s Construction Program.

“Ahmad has completed countless jobs for me in a professional and timely fashion. As a skilled painter and an honest and hardworking person, I recommend Ahmad for any job, big or small.”

Alan Seawell, TROSA’s Construction Manager & TROSA graduate

Today, Ahmad is giving back to TROSA. Not only has he hired other TROSA graduates, who are “hardworking” and “loyal,” Ahmad has also left his mark around the TROSA campus where his company painted our two new dormitories, multipurpose gymnasium, and the new TROSA Thrift Store, which will open this summer. “While I was at TROSA, I would make mistakes, but I left with the understanding of how to live a life without drugs and the knowledge and skills to operate a small business,” says Ahmad. And, for that, Ahmad will always be thankful he walked through the front gates of TROSA in 2003.

Like Ahmad, Jessie is making a difference in the community. A vivacious, energetic 31 year old, Jessie beams as she discusses the surprise on the faces of the homeless men and women she serves when she tells them of her own struggle with addiction. Jessie was the first in her family to attend college. Unfortunately, however, her addiction to heroin overpowered her love of reading and ruined her chance of graduating.

After dropping out of college just 18 credits shy of graduating, Jessie began to work full-time in the customer service department of a local car dealership. “I was 22 years old and I was doing a great job. I even got to travel for work. My college friends who were business majors were jealous of my success because I was beating the system.” However, Jessie’s addiction caught up with her. The dealership, which had already supported her through one trip to rehab, let her go.

Jessie spent the next four years at TROSA where several members of her family had also received treatment. At only 23, Jessie had her whole life ahead of her. She worked hard at TROSA, first learning the pleasure of small successes during her vocational training in the kitchen. “I was not a cook—I couldn’t even fry an egg,” she says, “but I learned to take pride in everything I did.” As she became more confident, she began to train in the Women’s Program.

After spending six months at TROSA, Jessie began to oversee the Education Program, which provides residents the opportunity to advance their education through Adult Basic Education, GED classes and college courses. “I never had a purpose before, but helping others became a cause for me,” says Jessie. She credits TROSA’s model with instilling in her the value of a strong work ethic and fostering her passion for serving others while also providing her the opportunity to earn her college degree from Wesleyan University through TROSA’s Scholars Program.

Today, Jessie is the Transitional Housing Coordinator at a local non-profit organization. She manages two housing facilities for 16 formerly homeless men and women in Durham. “The partnership building abilities and soft skills I developed at TROSA are invaluable in my role now,” describes Jessie.

“My experience at TROSA taught me how to take care of myself and gave me the skills to support others, which fueled my interest in counseling.” With hopes of becoming a licensed professional counselor (LPC), Jessie is now working towards her master’s degree in Community Counseling and looks back at her experience at TROSA as an important milestone in her recovery.

The cornerstone of TROSA’s innovative treatment program is the vocational training we provide to residents through our administrative offices and social enterprises (such as moving, lawn care, warehousing, auto mechanics, sales, construction, and catering). The program affords residents like Ahmad and Jessie the opportunity to develop a strong work ethic and a wide variety of marketable job skills.
The vocational training programs also create a sense of community and shared responsibility for the individual’s and the group’s success. Reggie, a soft-spoken 50 year old, was “going nowhere” before he heard about TROSA from fellow inmates and decided to enroll in the program. For the past 32 months, Reggie has been at TROSA where he is recovering from his 30-year addiction to crack cocaine and alcohol. At TROSA, Reggie is “learning how to stay clean” and has taken TROSA’s motto of “Each One, Teach One” to heart. As a Crew Boss in TROSA Moving, Reggie has taken it upon himself to support men who are beginning their recovery as he oversees small teams of residents on move jobs throughout the country. “It feels good to be trusted again,” says Reggie. “At TROSA, people believe in you. And now, I believe in myself.”

At TROSA, we see residents develop and grow, both professionally and personally, every day. We are not surprised by the strong work ethic, responsibility, and positive attitude our graduates bring to their new roles in the community.

The Impact

Thousand

- Thousands have been served through the program since 1994.
- 100% of graduates finished the program with full-time employment secured.
- More than 85% of graduates remained sober after one year compared to national statistics of 40-60% of graduates from other programs.
- More than 95% of recent graduates did not have new criminal convictions one year after graduating.

Planet

- TROSA has purchased and renovated more than 30 properties in the community.
- TROSA diverts items that would potentially be sent to the landfill by reusing or reselling these products to support our programming. TROSA has collected hundreds of tractor trailer loads of donated items and products.

Profit

- TROSA’s income-generating businesses and vocational training programs generate more than 80% of its $13 million annual budget, reducing TROSA’s reliance on fundraising to 15-20%.
- TROSA provides these truly comprehensive services at no charge to the individuals it serves.
Studies have shown that every $1 investment in substance abuse treatment saves as much as $7 in lost wages & medical, criminal justice and other costs to the community.

Make a Financial Gift Today
It costs about $75 a day for someone to receive job training, counseling, housing, and other services at TROSA, but it’s money well spent.

You can make an investment today by becoming a TROSA Friend ($75-$499 annual gift), Ally ($500-$999) or Partner ($1,000+). All groups receive special benefits and discounts on some TROSA services and, most importantly, provide vital financial support for our programming.

TROSA Wish List
TROSA provides food, clothing, housing, toiletries, transportation, and school and work supplies for all residents – more than 750 people a year. We rely on donations from people and companies near and far to meet all of the needs of our residents. In particular, we have a significant need for:

- Used vehicles
- Dental services
- Computers (Windows 7+)
- Flat-screen monitors
- Bras and undergarments (new)
- Women’s dress clothes (sizes 10-16)
- Women’s dress shoes (sizes 10-11)
- Women’s tennis shoes (sizes 9.5-12)
- Men’s tennis shoes (sizes 10-14)
- Men’s khaki pants (sizes 34+)

Contact TROSA’s In-kind donations department at 919.419.1059 if you would like to donate any of the items listed above.

“When I got to TROSA, I couldn’t even look up, and now I can look up and smile and know that I have opportunities and options that are endless. TROSA didn’t save my life, but it allowed me the opportunity to save my life. Because you’ve got to want it. If you don’t want it, it’s not going to happen for you. But life can come from underneath a bridge, in a box, to where I am now.”

KAREN ADAMS (PICTURED ABOVE)
TROSA GRADUATE & STAFF IN TRAINING