



## HPOG helps a lost soul find his way

**After struggling with addiction for most of his life, Charles found purpose and redemption through Cook Inlet Tribal Council's Health Professions Opportunity Grant (CITC HPOG) program.**

Since the age of 13, Charles was prisoner to his addictions. He started huffing glue and cooking spray before moving on to alcohol and marijuana, and eventually cocaine and meth. He was living and working in South Dakota among the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, but all his money went to feed his habits. Charles experienced several run-ins with the law, including a felony charge of grand theft that would come back to haunt him later. As a result of his rampant drug use, he does not remember much about that time.

Charles's mother was a strong and outspoken Native woman. So, when she fell ill in 2013, Charles moved to Anchorage, Alaska to be her primary caretaker. She was completely dependent on Charles, but his addictions continued. He cared for her for two years before she passed away. Losing his mother took an emotional toll on Charles.

Years later, while visiting the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC), he saw a flyer for their HPOG program. It stopped him dead in his tracks; "I felt a tug in my heart telling me to look further into it," he remembers. Charles took a leap of faith and submitted an application in June 2018.

Upon acceptance into the program, he attended CITC HPOG's Preparing Alaskans for Training in Healthcare (PATH) Academy where he obtained certifications for Basic First Aid, Mental Health First Aid, Basic Life Support, and Bloodborne Pathogens. While researching the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program for a presentation, Charles realized this training was the right path for him.

Up to this point, Charles hid his struggles with alcohol and substance abuse from the staff. But as he prepared for CNA training, he knew he had to face and overcome his addiction if he wanted to succeed as a healthcare professional. In August 2018, he applied for a residential inpatient program at the CITC Ernie Turner Center (ETC). He withdrew from CNA training to focus on sobriety. School could wait but his battle with addiction could not.

For six months, Charles worked tirelessly to overcome his dependency issues. The following May, Charles was ready to resume his training. Unfortunately, the CNA training was suspended, and the other option did not begin until September. While waiting, he attended a Personal Care Assistant (PCA) program. When it was time to begin the CNA program, HPOG staff provided Charles with transportation assistance for the hour-long daily commute. Eventually he obtained a spot in a transitional home in Anchorage and celebrated a year of sobriety.

As he prepared to complete the CNA program and sit for the certification exam, the State of Alaska Board of Nursing flagged his felony conviction, potentially barring him from the test. Charles kept faith and hoped for the best.

On January 7, 2020, Charles received clearance to sit for his exam. He passed the test a week later and has been working as a Certified Nursing Assistant ever since. His next goal is to become a Registered Nurse.

**"Stay the course and CITC HPOG will stay in your corner. My path is well lit now and with every step forward, it just gets brighter and brighter."**

This success story was self-identified by the grantee and information contained in this document was provided by the grantee.