

Van L. Smith, Jr.

Van L. Smith, Jr. is a model of successful reentry and recovery. Van directs Recovery Houses of Rochester (RHR), running programs for men in reentry and in addiction treatment and recovery. He is also an articulate community spokesperson for improving reentry and recovery processes.

In his mid-forties, Van has already experienced three lives. In a prior phase, Van experienced intense growth and learning. He honed skills and experience, built family, accumulated resources, joined a church community, and professed his faith. In 1990s, while beginning his career as a professional addictions therapist, Van realized he had to contribute to service delivery. He studied the national Oxford House model < www.oxfordhouse.org >, which promotes recovery from addictions through nurturing, responsibility, and democratic structure. Envisioning himself providing peer supportive housing for recovering alcoholics and addicts, and with others' help, Van founded RHR. (See RHR on the Members and Partners page.)

Before these productive life phases was the period when Van committed offenses and was convicted and incarcerated. He struggled with a lack of self-worth and other fears. He could not recognize his gifts and potential. This first of Van's adult life phases is past yet its memory fuels Van's passion and commitment.

Van Smith is not shy about telling his story. He knows it inspires others and definitely strengthens him as he continues to build RHR as an organization where men, in residence and on a day-to-day basis, take ownership for their lives and begin to direct themselves on healthy, productive paths. (10/1507)



Van Smith (r) and Mike Blegg, chair of SMART, discuss reentry strategies.