

Vignette 1: Jack

Jack is a 33-year-old, unauthorized immigrant, born in Brazil. Jack lives in Newark's Ironbound section. Jack is from a religious family; his father is a church pastor living in Brazil. Jack is not particularly religious and came to think of himself as the "black sheep" of the family. Jack started drinking alcohol in his early 20s, after he moved to the United States, at that time he was drinking socially and only during the weekends. Over time, his alcohol intake increased due to work-related pressures and financial stress. He went from a six-pack of beer on a Friday or Saturday night to a twelve-pack. Eventually he started drinking during the week as well as on weekends and soon progressed to cocaine use. The cocaine use led to insomnia and other health-related issues. Jack eventually lost his business: not only could he not run the business because he was always high, but his cocaine habit put additional stress on his worsening financial situation, which eventually meant he couldn't pay his business or personal bills.

Through-out this time, Jack tended to downplay and minimize his alcohol and drug issues. He avoided talking about them and even thinking about them.

It was at the height of his alcohol and drug use that Jack found himself frequently going out with a similarly rough crowd of acquaintances. One evening, when he was hanging out with friends in Newark, someone from another group erroneously accused Jack of being an informant. As retribution, he shot Jack in the hip and foot using an automatic weapon. As Jack and his buddies were under the influence of illegal drugs when he was shot, his friends dragged his heavily bleeding body into the car and dropped him off at a nearby gas station and left. The gas station attendant called for an ambulance due to Jack's heavy bleeding.

Once at the hospital, the bullets in his hip were successfully removed, but one that went into his foot was not, causing an infection that led to a three-week hospital stay. Upon discharge, Jack went to his sister's home to convalesce. To protect him, his sister hid all the alcohol she had; however, he found a bottle of liquor in the basement. Under the influence of alcohol, he stole his sister's car, was involved in an accident that severely damaged the car and led to a "driving under the influence" (DUI) arrest.

After the shooting and the auto accident, Jack realized that he was in trouble, nonetheless, he continued drinking until his court date. During this period, his wife, to whom he had been married since he was 19, divorced him due to the alcohol use, drug use, and related financial woes. Jack was referred by the court to New Jersey's Intoxicated Driver Resource Center (IDRC) for education and assessment for substance abuse treatment. IDRC then referred Jack to a local mental health agency for substance abuse treatment.

Jack has been abstinent from both drugs and alcohol for just over a year as evidenced by urine testing. Although Jack doesn't really want to go to counselling, he has established a relationship with his therapist, is opening up more, and making notable progress. In addition to therapy, he has started going to church, engages in positive self-care, exercises, and works full time. He describes his abstinence as a religious awakening.

Jack did not, initially, report the shooting to the police, in part because he was an undocumented immigrant and fearful of deportation, but also because he suspected that his assailant was affiliated with a gang (this assumption is based on the type of automatic weapon used). After time to think it through, Jack did eventually report the shooting, under the promise of a U-Visa. Even with this protection, the shooting and the fear of revenge continue to haunt him; the shooting continues to preoccupy his thoughts. He is anxious and has isolated himself. He stopped attending church services for fear of running into the "wrong" people. He was living with a friend, but routinely leaves town daily for his safety. He does not want to return to Brazil because he doesn't have a life there (as he has been in United States since he was 18), so he's thinking about relocating out of state.

In therapy, Jack is continuing to build his coping skills, reinforcing the positive steps he has made, and is working on understanding the traumatic events in his life. During therapy, he recognized that his father had a history of substance abuse problems, helping him recognize that all humans have failings, and that he really wasn't an exception in his family. Jack was encouraged to see a primary care clinician to address his sleep as well as anxiety issues. Jack had previously professed a "love a water", so he was encouraged to use the community pool on a regular basis as well as walk by the river.