

Young People in Recovery

“State of the Organization Address”

February 20, 2014

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My Fellow Young People in Recovery & Supporters:

As I sit here on Martin Luther King Day, thinking about the enormous strides one man was able to make towards civil advancement in this country, through passionate, fearless leadership, even when faced with hate, violence and eventually death, I cannot help but be inspired to write to you all, addressing the current state of our movement, the recovery movement as it pertains to Young People in Recovery.

Before I address what I hold so dear to my heart, this social movement that will one day undeniably shift the way we view recovery in this country, I wanted to take the time to personally thank you all for your achievements thus far. This organization, a grass-roots organization, is only as strong and enduring as our chapters are. Within these chapters lies the heart of YPR, that heart being every one of you. Without you, your dedication to this cause, your perseverance through adversity; not only advocating for the recovery community, but also courageously championing your own personal recovery, YPR would be just an idea. However because you chose to speak out against the social injustices that we, as a body of people experience, we are on the brink of permanently altering this country’s perception. A once hushed discussion is now forcing itself to the very desks of our trusted elected servants, because you, again, are fearless in the face of adversity, and unwilling to passively take part in a system that is broken. Once again, I want to thank and commend you for your service to YPR, without you, I wouldn’t have the honor of addressing you through this YPR’s first ever, “State of the Organization Address”.

Young People in Recovery is on the verge of exploding. I say this because recently we have received over ten chapter applications, in less than three weeks of it going live on our website. We have individuals interested in developing chapters from Portland to Del Ray, we currently have chapters from Alaska to Texas, and we will undeniably continue to expand, as others hear of the tremendous work we’ve been able to accomplish as an organization thus far. We have incorporated in the state of Colorado, and for the first time in three years, Young People in Recovery is completely independent. I would like to thank the tireless efforts of the original National Leadership Council, as well as the Executive Committee for making this happen, and of course our trusty CPO Douglas Rudolph, who spent many late nights rummaging through paperwork and legal limbos in order to make it officially happen on paper.

We have named Justin Luke Riley our President & CEO, and have placed our trust in him, to help guide our organization to a whole new level. Doug Rudolph has come on to

continue to guide us through his beautifully crafted public-policy agenda, while bringing his skills and expertise in the legal realm, as Chief Policy Officer. They together entrusted myself, to help foster our chapters into a new, more efficient, way of managing and administering our policy initiatives. We now have policies and procedures in place for things like funding, and we have crafted a document, which was signed by our current chapter leads, called the Chapter Compliance Form, which serves as a standard template for chapter policies and procedures. YPR chapters have always been, and will always be, program of Young People in Recovery. Money raised from each chapter is disbursed into our centralized bank account, where we are now, for the first time in the history of Young People in Recovery, able to fund every chapter. Justin, Doug and myself literally exist solely to support you every step of the way, and we take great pride in doing so.

Before I delve deeper into the current state of Young People in Recovery, I'd like to briefly share some of my own personal history as it relates to YPR. I was first recruited to be a part of YPR, while interning at SAMHSA in October of 2012. I was recruited by Devin Fox while at Starbucks, and was immediately enamored by the cause, the movement itself. I had recently graduated with a BA degree from The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, where I studied the history of social movements as it pertained to The Free Speech Movement of the 1960's. While studying, I had the opportunity to write my senior thesis on Mario Savio, the charismatic leader of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, in the 60's. Mario and his fellow students essentially overthrew an entire administration through civil disobedience, having been trained by the very best of the trade (they were activists during the Civil Rights Movement). Their efforts blazed a trail for movements like the Anti-War movement, and the Student Movement. I have been fascinated with youth movements, social movements, activism, and free speech ever since.

I tell you this now because I want you to know, that being a staff member of YPR is more than just a paid position for me. I am so deeply entrenched in this cause, our cause, that at any moment if we veer from the path, from this movement at large, I would literally do anything and everything in my power to ensure that we recognize that before we are anything, a leader, a spokesperson, an entrepreneur, a chapter member, or an advocate, we are individuals who believe in our cause first. I would rather no one ever heard of my name for the rest of my existence, and we actually create social change, than for me to gain recognition for something that we failed at. I would, and will, be more than happy to resign to the backrooms of this movement, if it meant fostering a more productive influence upon our movement at large.

You're probably right now saying to yourself, "What is he talking about"? Well let me tell you. Often times as advocates we can lose our way. We often can get caught up in things like spotlight, money, making a name for ourselves, or attention, that we forget why we are here in the first place. Sure everyone admires recognition, and many of you deserve recognition for the countless hours you have volunteered and dedicated into fostering this organization into its current state. Yet we must remember why we are here. We cannot lose sight of the path that we are set to journey upon, for outside influences that will tear a social movement like ours apart. These things will blind us, and distract us from the real goal of this movement at large, social justice. Yes, we need to tell our recovery stories. Yet we mustn't forget that with telling our stories comes action, and that action is to putting pen to paper, fingers to key board, and working

until we are so sick of hearing about the recovery movement, that we go to bed only to wake up in the morning with so much passion that you work harder, and more dedicated than ever before.

You see this is the passion we must never lose sight of. This passion comes through understanding a few things as it relates to our movement at large. First, we are underfunded and underrepresented at every level, local, state and federally. Addiction is classified in the DSM as a Mental Illness, yet we are hard-pressed to qualify for any of their services. Second, the AMA defines addiction as a disease, yet we are the most underfunded public health issue in the country. We are stigmatized on every level, in every race, gender, and age bracket in this country. You see these are the issues we face as a community every day. Not whether or not people recognize us for our efforts, or whether or not an individual progresses through the ranks. At the end of the day, that's surface nonsense that will tear us apart.

Our cause is that we are a community of people, who are discriminated against, as we feel the blunt end of social injustices every step of the way. This is our cause. No one should be asked to advocate, we should do it because it is happening to us every day. We should be pissed! We should be angry! **THIS IS OUR CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE!** We need to live our lives like true activists in every form of the word. Eli Wiesel once said, "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference." We cannot be indifferent towards this movement, or this cause. We the people, have the power to effectively shape the way addiction is not only treated in the country, but ultimately effectively shape the public's perception of just who we are to begin with. The recovery community possesses some of the most heartwarming, passionate people, and together we mustn't ever taste defeat in the hands of indifference.

This problem we face is real, and it won't go away unless we continue to act as a unified movement and organization without worrying about what our peers are doing, but by continuing to selflessly act for the cause, yes I said it again, the cause. You see until we receive justice, until we are funded like a body of disease stricken people should be, we mustn't stop continuing to blaze a path for the generations that will come after us. Together we can change society. Together we will, as a united body of people, as a untied organization, untied under the Young People in Recovery banner. When the day comes when we have our Civil Rights victory, we will go down in history as pioneers to this great movement, selflessly dedicating our lives because we believed in it, because wanted justice, because it is what we are supposed to do.

Until this day comes, until we have our Civil Rights victory, YPR will provide these services that the recovery community lacks. We will provides trainings and seminars, addressing things like better access to employment and housing, since we don't possess a housing authority, or an employment agency, or even educational services like the Mental Health departments do. Since the government won't do its job and provide us with these things, we will do their job for them! Our chapters will be carrying out history in the making, as an approach of this size, on this landscape, has never even been attempted. We are literally making history, and we will succeed in doing so.

Until the day comes when we have ironed out all the details of our trainings, provided every chapter with the proper resources and materials needed to effectively host monthly seminars, and until our chapter members are trained on how to carry out these trainings, I ask you to continue to dedicate your passions and your time to our organization. Mario Savio once said, “There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious—makes you so sick at heart—that you can't take part. You can't even passively take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.” Until we are ready to make history, I ask you to stop the machine that is a broken system of care for everyone one of us. I ask you to believe, believe in the mission, believe in each other, and believe in yourselves.

To those of you who have just joined our organization, welcome home.