

## *Growing in Community: Colton's Story*



"I'm Colton James Hughes. I'm a born-again taco slinger, a massage therapist, a bicyclist, a jack-of-all-trades, and I am an Eastsider, for sure.

Starting last year, I was on probation for my second OWI. I was placed in the Sobriety Court Program and I needed to complete 120 hours of community service. I had lost my license. I found ANC on the list of places I could complete my hours, and I came here and spoke with Kat, the Volunteer Coordinator, and she told me about all the different programs and opportunities that the center had. It was all stuff I was getting into at the time...during my evolutionary chrysalis.

I've spent most of my time with BreadBasket and the farmers market, but I also spent some time at the GardenHouse. When I first walked in the GardenHouse - I had never been in a greenhouse or anything - everything was so lush and green with vines everywhere. For the past few years I've been into plants and trying to have a bunch around the house that kept dying. But then I learned that they need sunlight, water, and love, and they survive! The GardenHouse taught me so much that I use today. For example: I was told about the little suckers on the tomato plants that steal energy from the plant. But if you take them off, it allows more energy to go into the actual tomato. I thought that was so interesting.

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I really liked the feeling of BreadBasket – seeing all the people who come through really shows how much this program impacts their lives; it's part of their weekly routine. Some people need this program to survive. I also was the parking lot attendant for the summer market. I like to refer to myself as the officer or sheriff of the lot. One of the biggest things about this job is that so many of the neighbors thanked me. They would come up and tell me how necessary it is. How grateful they were to me. I took pride in that role.

Allen Neighborhood Center is colorful and it's accepting. I don't ever have to feel like I can't be myself – which, for the record, I'm pretty open about the crazy person I am – but I can have fun and open up here and nobody's gonna think of me any differently, and they're probably just going to love me even more. That's just what the Eastside is about: being yourself and it's accepted.

The staff seem to really care about this place - I don't think I've ever seen anyone in a bad mood. Even people who used to work here still come back to help out because they like what's going on here. It's like the hub of the neighborhood; everyone knows about this place. I would see my massage clients at the market or BreadBasket, I see my neighbors, I see people from the groups I attend through Sobriety Court – I see tons of people that I know, all in one place. It seems random, but it's not. It's a neighborhood center. A center of the neighborhood. It's given me a sense of community that I never had before. And I think part of that is everyone having a place to come together. I mean, not just to get food assistance or go to BreadBasket, but the market has music, activities, and dogs...a sense of community.

Allen Neighborhood Center has helped to show me that there is more than just me and my story. I feel like a lot of people, you know, you're the center of your own universe. But when you come here, you see all these different people and some of them have struggles, but they also have this passion. You see what they have to go through, and it makes you really grateful for what you have but also want to do something to give back and help them live a better life.

ANC has a multitude of ways to help people in different situations. I know that if someone had something come up, even if ANC didn't have a resource for it, they would find a resource to help them out. A lot of other places just have their one niche, but the Allen Neighborhood Center has a broad spectrum of ways that they can help people. Like a jack-of-all-trades. That's why I fit in so well here.

With Sobriety Court, I've had to become a new person. Between what I've learned in AA and the experience that I've had through ANC, I've evolved into a better person. I like the neighborhood center so much that I was telling my counselors that I plan to keep going with my volunteer work.

It's given me a feeling that I'm doing something better."