

# BARBARA'S STORY

**M**y son attended one of Houston's sober high schools. During his senior year, as we began to research universities that would be appropriate for a 19 year old in recovery, it became clear that there was a gap in the Houston Recovery Community. Houston offers a multitude of resources for high school students including two sober high schools, four alternative peer groups, and 12-step meetings geared toward young people. There is also abundant support for adults in recovery with over 140 AA meetings offered. Houston's college-aged population had to leave our city to participate in age appropriate recovery in Texas.

Collegiate recovery programs literally save lives. Environmental pressures make college campuses high risk settings for students in recovery. These students want higher education to be more than attending classes and earning a degree. They want the full college experience that includes socializing and being part of a group on campus. Collegiate recovery programs offer students a safe environment; healthy social interactions; support groups and 12-step meetings; guidance and accountability; sober housing; and most importantly, a sense of community. As the fourth largest city in America, Houston has the population, the need and the resources to create the number one collegiate recovery program in the nation.

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The University of Houston has recognized the need for this type of program. After meeting with Dr. Richard Walker, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Services, and Mr. Floyd Robinson, Vice President for Student Affairs, Health and Wellness, a plan was devised to establish Cougars in Recovery-the collegiate recovery program for the University of Houston! Meetings were held with the directors of the recovery programs at Texas Tech and the University of Texas at Austin as well as the founder of the UT-Austin program. Interviews were held with students currently immersed in collegiate recovery programs and the senior classes at both of Houston's recovery high schools. Parents were contacted to determine their concerns regarding their children going away to college. Results of this research showed that students want to feel safe and to spend time with others in recovery. They fear being around drugs and being tempted to use or drink. Parents want their children to be safe and have accountability.

Mission and vision statements were created based on students' concerns. Student expectations were set and an application for the program was developed. UH Student Housing and Residential Life provided office space, meeting space, dorm space and a lounge space for the program. Early fundraising efforts resulted in donations that will cover the salary for a program director who will act as an educator, counselor, group facilitator and mentor to the students.

The inaugural year for Cougars in Recovery began in the fall of 2013 with ten students; 6 living in sober housing, 1 living in a dormitory, and 3 commuters. The program offers a drop-in center that is available between classes and in the evenings for students to study, watch TV, play video games, and be surrounded by others in recovery in a safe and sober environment. The AA group that was already established on campus holds its weekly meeting in our meeting space. We are holding a speaker meeting weekly that is open to the Houston recovery community. At these meetings people come and share their individual stories. Recovery grows through sharing experience, strength and hope and this is happening weekly on our campus. Our most important meeting is the weekly check-in for the students who have been accepted into the Cougars in Recovery program. This meeting allows us to see how each student is doing overall and direct them to the various resources on campus as needed. Our community does not provide recovery, it supports recovery by allowing students to do more than simply attend classes and earn a degree. It allows students to participate in the full college experience by having a peer group, a safe environment, and the ability to feel a part of something on campus.