

School of Life helps man go from homeless to public speaker

David DeMille January 3, 2012

ST. GEORGE - Homeless, unemployed and with 56 cents in his pocket, Scott Williamson said he was at a pivotal point when he attended his first School of Life training session in August 2011. Five months later, he is living on his own in St. George, working, attending college and sharing his experiences as a public speaker in what his supporters call a stirring turnaround.

"He's just an inspiration to all of us," said Jack Rolfe, president of the School of Life Foundation, a life skills training program sponsored locally by the Wade Family Foundation. "As we do these community trainings, we hope it takes people somewhere, and he's just been such a great example."

Williamson, 42, said Monday that he is chipping away at the goals he has set for himself, working long hours each day to put his life back together after a drug-related two-year prison term left him with nothing. He made his way from the prison in Draper to St. George, where he had some contacts and had previously attended Dixie State College, and was fortunate enough to meet the right people after that first School of Life training session. From there, it's just been hard work and having the motivation to succeed, Williamson said. "Did I have a little luck? Yeah," he said. "But I had to be the one to take responsibility for my actions and move in a positive direction."

Along the way, Williamson said he has seen the difficulties people face while trying to come back from poor circumstances, as even seemingly routine steps along the way tended to come with obstacles. Obtaining identification was a struggle, with the paperwork required and having no transportation to the Department of Motor Vehicles building in Hurricane. Getting back into school proved difficult after having defaulted on previous college loans, and finding work took the trust of someone willing to give him another chance, he said.

In a typical day, he is up at 7 a.m., headed to school, and not done working until 10 p.m. or later, all while trying to find time to act as a speaker and be an example to other people trying to take similar strides, he said. "You can come up with so many excuses not to do something," he said, stressing the importance of having the right mindset. "Your attitude is the worst killer. You start that negative thinking and it's just a spiral downward."

Michelle Orton, a life coach with New Leaf Coaching, has taken Williamson on as a regular client, and said his willingness to ask for help was the first step in showing he really wanted to change. "He's realized that he is his own product, and the product he created before created his previous, sub-par lifestyle," she said. "The product he's created now is rich, developing, it's growing and it's something that has depth and character."

As a model for others to come back from prison, homelessness or any other desperate situation, Williamson shows what can be done, she said, urging anyone else who could use similar help to seek it. "He has all the tools to have a successful life, and he's going to use them," she said. "It shows that no matter where you are, you can make it."

Now, Williamson is reaching people every day, and inspiring those around him. Imi Kun, executive chef and co-owner of the Riverwalk Grill and Steakhouse in St. George, where Williamson works, said he is glad to have such a positive person around each day, and someone who puts so much of himself into what he does. "I felt pretty good about him right away and gave him a chance, and he took it, and I'm proud of him," Kun said.

For more information

Learn more about the School of Life Foundation at www.schooloflifefoundation.org.

