

# Running for a Purpose

## Training for a Marathon Gives Recovering Addicts a New Direction

By Kari Redfield  
Photos courtesy Nicholas Sterner, Sr.

Imagine being addicted to drugs or alcohol. Your addiction takes over your life to the point that you have to enter a long-term rehabilitation program. This is not a 90-day detox; this is one to two years in the Denver Rescue Mission's New Life Program. Then imagine, in the midst of your recovery, someone telling you that you can run a marathon. Training would begin just four months before the event.

Fifteen men fighting homelessness and addiction participated in the Post-News Colorado Colfax Marathon May 20, running as part of the Denver Rescue Mission Marathon Team, sponsored by Dalbey Education Institute. Nine ran the full marathon and six ran the half. They ran side-by-side with mission staff members and community supporters.

The men range in age from 20 to 61, and their stories are as diverse as their ages. Most important, each man is fighting to change his life. Through this multi-phase rehabilitation program, the men discover that a major life change is not easy, but with small steps, loving support and guidance it is possible.

The Galloway Training Group provided training, including a visit from head trainer and U.S. Olympian Jeff Galloway. The training group led four weekly runs and one weekend run during the four months leading up to the marathon.

"Through our various training sessions, we've seen people make significant life changes as they train for a half or full marathon," said Galloway. "We are pleased to be involved with this worthwhile program."

Probably the principle support for the men is one of their own: Nick Sterner, Sr., a five-time marathon runner. Sterner ran last year's inaugural Colfax Marathon and this year he ran with his son, Nick Sterner, Jr., for the first time. Both father and son are residents at the Denver Rescue Mission's Crossing facility and participants in the New Life Program. Three mornings a week Sterner, Sr. led the men on 5:30 a.m. neighborhood runs and held Friday night meetings to educate and motivate the team.

"It's an incredible feat," Sterner said. "Fourteen of these guys had never run before, besides my son, who'd run a couple 10Ks."

"We had some guys that did really really well. A lot of them were addicted to crack or other drugs. These guys who were running were actually guys addicted to those drugs, some of them for many years."

"They started developing a habit and achievement of success. They have begun interacting with the community

and achieving personal goals they never ever imagined. It's just amazing what you can help people do, and what people can do."

Sterner is quite a success story himself. He graduated from the New Life Program April 13, after 18 months, and lived in transitional housing close to the Rescue Mission. Since being part of the transformation of his team and himself, he's started a nonprofit (see related story) to help others recovering from drug abuse find and develop a positive and rewarding habit and make incremental successes through running events.

"Everyone attached to the Post-News Colorado Colfax Marathon is excited by our new partnership with Denver Rescue Mission and the Galloway Training Group," said Dr. Jay Gershen, Vice Chancellor for External Affairs at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center and Chairman of the Marathon's Board of Directors. "To be able to share our passion for running with this inspirational group of men has been a pleasure thus far and we've only just begun."

"As a young man, I went from making a lot of bad decisions to training on the Olympic cycling team because athletics gave me hope and direction," said Russ Dalbey, founder and CEO of the Dalbey Education Institute and sponsor of the Denver Rescue Mission Marathon Team. "All of us here at the Dalbey Education Institute are proud to give that same kind of hope to these men who have made a difficult decision to change their lives. We've all been inspired by their story, and we look forward to helping these guys change their habits and continue their journey all the way to finish line."

Brad Meuli, President and CEO of the Denver Rescue Mission, is enthusiastic about the potential that running a marathon provides in helping recovering addicts find healthy lifestyle alternatives, and about the partnership with the event.

"The Denver Rescue Mission is proud to be able to partner with such a prestigious event as the Post-News Colorado Colfax Marathon," Meuli said. "The Colfax Marathon staff and the Galloway

Training Group have shown our men in the New Life Program unwavering dedication and support."

To learn more about the Denver Rescue Mission Marathon Team, or to support the team contact: Greta Walker, [GWalker@denrescue.org](mailto:GWalker@denrescue.org) or 303-618-4004, or go online to [denverrescuemission.org](http://denverrescuemission.org).

To learn more about the Post-News Colorado Colfax Marathon contact Caitlin Ring, [caitlin@coloradocolfaxmarathon.org](mailto:caitlin@coloradocolfaxmarathon.org) or call 303-435-7683.

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### Running for Recovery Gains Legs

Nick Sterner, Sr. and his partner, a real estate broker in Boulder, formed a nonprofit to replicate the program with various groups in the area for kids in rehab.

The organization, Activity-Inspired Rehabilitation, will help other nonprofits offer this inspirational program to the people it serves. "Some of these organizations have everything, from transitional housing to drug rehab to rental assistance," says Sterner. "We want to offer this program free for kids to help them create a healthy lifestyle."

"It teaches them success over a short period time. Within three weeks, everyone runs a 5K, then a 5-mile event, then a 10-mile race, followed by a half marathon and finally a full marathon. It walks them through the steps of connecting with friends and runners and setting some goals and achieving them."

To find out more or donate to Activity-Inspired Rehabilitation, go online to [theairfoundation.org](http://theairfoundation.org) or email [nick@theairfoundation.org](mailto:nick@theairfoundation.org).



Nicholas Sterner Jr., Caitlin Ring of the Colorado Colfax Marathon and Nicholas Sterner Sr. celebrate after the marathon.

### Meet the Men

By Nicholas Stern Sr. and Kari Redfield

In 2004, **Nicholas Stern Sr.** gave up eight years of sobriety to literally go into the streets to find his son. Within six months, he was buying and selling drugs within the same circle as his son. In the summer of 2005, son and dad were introduced to the Denver Rescue Mission's New Life (drug rehabilitation) Program.

**Nicholas Stern Jr.** made his dad entering the program part of his agreement to enter it himself.

The youngest of the group was 21-year-old **John Bledsoe**, who came all the way to Denver from Oklahoma in search of his New Life.

On the other end of the spectrum, at age 61, is a local hero, **Jerry Hartman**, who recently graduated from the program.

About a year ago **Danny Graham** left the New Life Program and was encouraged back by a chaplain. Graham has embraced each and every training run, and his mother waits at the finish line with a smile.

The group recruited **Mike Laguardia** as they saw him running down Smith Road. Laguardia also engages in weight lifting to balance out his ascetic, healthy approach to rehabilitation.

**Shannon Chandler**, who accomplished an amazing transformation, tells people about attempting to cross Colfax to purchase drugs during the 2005 marathon. This year he ran it.

**Wayne Irish**, who also recently graduated from the New Life Program, walks almost every day after work to stay in shape.

**Gabe "the rocket" Roffe** is a former skiing and snowboard competitor. His strategy was to accomplish the run/walk technique by sprinting the first 100 yards.

**Big Jesus "Zeus" Ortiz**, whose son will complete the kids' mile run, reminds us that the heart in a man rules the body as he prepares to walk the half-marathon course that ends in Lakewood.

"**Little Joe" Stark** reminds us that the size of a man is measured by the amount of heart he applies to his commitment.

**Bobby Brewer**, a former boxer, has embraced this new sport and the full marathon.

**Harold Miller**, who was in a cast for the month of March, has returned from injured reserve — without reservation — for the half marathon.

**Steven Williams** didn't start working with the team until mid-March, but with little more than a two-month training cycle, he took on the challenge of the 26.2-mile Colfax course.

**Mike Marson** rejoined the group in the last three weeks before the marathon; he had trained with the group early in the season and then dropped out. He lost 27 pounds in about six weeks and then realized he could walk the half marathon with no problem.